THE COUNTRY I COME FROM

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BY

HENRY LAWSON

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AN OLD MATE OF YOUR FATHER'S

You remember when we hurried home from the old bush school how we were sometimes startled by a bearded apparition, who smiled kindly down on us, and whom our mother introduced, as we raked off our hats, as, "An old mate of your father's on the diggings, Johnny." And he would pat our heads and say we were fine boys, or girls—as the case may have been—and that we had our father's nose but our mother's eyes, or the other way about; and say that the baby was the dead spit of its mother, and then add, for father's benefit: "But yet he's like you, Tom." It did seem strange to the children to hear him address the old man by his Christian name—considering that the mother always referred to him as "Father." She called the old mate Mr. So-and-so, and father called him Bill, or something to that effect.

Occasionally the old mate would come dressed in the latest city fashion, and at other times in a new suit of reach-me-downs, and yet again he would turn up in clean white moleskins, washed tweed coat, Crimean shirt, blucher boots, soft felt hat, with a

fresh-looking speckled handkerchief round his neck. But his face was mostly round and brown and jolly, his hands were always horny, and his beard grey. Sometimes he might have seemed strange and uncouth to us at first, but the old man never appeared the least surprised at anything he said or did—they understood each other so well—and we would soon take to this relic of our father's past, who would have fruit or lollies for us—strange that he always remembered them—and would surreptitiously slip "shilluns" into our dirty little hands, and tell us stories about the old days, "when me an' yer father was on the diggin's, an' you wasn't thought of, my boy."

Sometimes the old mate would stay over Sunday, and in the forenoon or after dinner he and father would take a walk amongst the deserted shafts of Sapling Gully or along Quartz Ridge, and criticise old ground, and talk of past diggers' mistakes, and second bottoms, and feelers, and dips, and leads—also outcrops—and absently pick up pieces of quartz and slate, rub them on their sleeves, look at them in an abstracted manner, and drop them again; and they would talk of some old lead they had worked on: "Hogan's party was here on one side of us, Macintosh was here on the other, Mac was getting good gold and so was Hogan, and now, why the blanky blank weren't we on gold?" And the mate would always agree that there was "gold in them ridges and gullies yet, if a man only had the money

behind him to git at it." And then perhaps the guv'nor would show him a spot where he intended to put down a shaft some day—the old man was always thinking of putting down a shaft. And these two old 'Fifty-Niners would mooch round and sit on their heels on the sunny mullock heaps and break clay lumps between their hands, and lay plans for the putting down of shafts, and smoke, till an urchin was sent to "look for his father and Mr. So-and-so, and tell 'em to come to their dinner."

And again—mostly in the fresh of the morning—they would hang about the fences on the selection and review the live stock: five dusty skeletons of cows, a hollow-sided calf or two, and one shocking piece of equine scenery—which, by the way, the old mate always praised. But the selector's heart was not in farming nor on selections—it was far away with the last new rush in West Australia or Queensland, or perhaps buried in the worked-out ground of Tambaroora, Married Man's Creek, or Araluen; and by-and-by the memory of some half-forgotten reef or lead or "Last Chance," "Nil Desperandum," or "Brown Snake" claim would take their thoughts far back and away from the dusty patch of sods and struggling sprouts called the crop, or the few discouraged, half-dead slips which comprised the orchard. Then their conversation would be pointed with many Golden Points, Baikery Hills, Deep Creeks, Maitland Bars, Specimen Flats, and Chinamen's Gullies. And so they'd yarn till the youngster

came to tell them that "Mother sez the breakfus is gettin' cold," and then the old mate would rouse himself and stretch and say, "Well, we mustn't keep the missus waitin', Tom!"

And, after tea, they would sit on a log of the wood-heap, or the edge of the verandah—that is, in warm weather—and yarn about Ballarat and Bendigo—of the days when we spoke of being "on" a place oftener than "at" it: *on* Ballarat, *on* Gulgong, *on* Lambing Flat, *on* Creswick—and they would use the definite article before the names, as: "on The Turon; The Lachlan; The Home Rule; The Canadian Lead." Then again they'd yarn of old mates, such as Tom Brook, Jack Henright, and poor Martin Ratcliffe—who was killed in his golden hole—and of other men whom they didn't seem to have known much about, and who went by the names of "Adelaide Adolphus," "Corney George," and other names which might have been more or less applicable.

And sometimes they'd get talking, low and mysterious like, about "Th' Eureka Stockade;" and if we didn't understand and asked questions, "What was the Eureka Stockade?" or "What did they do it for?" father'd say: "Now, run away, sonny, and don't bother; me and Mr. So-and-so want to talk." Father had the mark of a hole on his leg, which he said he got through a gun accident when a boy, and a scar on his side, that we saw when he was in swimming with us; he said he got that in an accident in

a quartz-crushing machine. Mr. So-and-so had a big scar on the side of his forehead that was caused by a pick accidentally slipping out of a loop in the rope, and falling down a shaft where he was working. But how was it they talked low, and their eyes brightened up, and they didn't look at each other, but away over sunset, and had to get up and walk about, and take a stroll in the cool of the evening when they talked about Eureka?

And, again they'd talk lower and more mysterious like, and perhaps mother would be passing the wood-heap and catch a word, and ask:

"Who was she, Tom?"

And Tom—father—would say:

"Oh, you didn't know her, Mary; she belonged to a family Bill knew at home."

And Bill would look solemn till mother had gone, and then they would smile a quiet smile, and stretch and say, "Ah, well!" and start something else.

They had yarns for the fireside, too, some of those old mates of our father's, and one of them would often tell how a girl—a queen of the diggings—was married, and had her wedding-ring made out of the gold of that field; and how the diggers weighed their gold with the new wedding-ring—for luck—by hanging the ring on the hook of the scales and attaching their chamois-leather gold bags to it (whereupon she boasted that four hundred ounces of the precious metal passed through her wedding-ring); and how

they lowered the young bride, blindfolded, down a golden hole in a big bucket, and got her to point out the drive from which the gold came that her ring was made out of. The point of this story seems to have been lost—or else we forgot it—but it was characteristic. Had the girl been lowered down a duffer, and asked to point out the way to the gold, and had she done so successfully, there would have been some sense in it.

And they would talk of King, and Maggie Oliver, and G. V. Brooke, and others, and remember how the diggers went five miles out to meet the coach that brought the girl actress, and took the horses out and brought her in in triumph, and worshipped her, and sent her off in glory, and threw nuggets into her lap. And how she stood upon the box-seat and tore her sailor hat to pieces, and threw the fragments amongst the crowd; and how the diggers fought for the bits and thrust them inside their shirt bosoms; and how she broke down and cried, and could in her turn have worshipped those men—loved them, every one. They were boys all, and gentlemen all. There were college men, artists, poets, musicians, journalists—Bohemians all. Men from all the lands and one. They understood art—and poverty was dead.

And perhaps the old mate would say slyly, but with a sad, quiet smile:

"Have you got that bit of straw yet, Tom?"

Those old mates had each three pasts behind

them. The two they told each other when they became mates, and the one they had shared.

And when the visitor had gone by the coach we noticed that the old man would smoke a lot, and think as much, and take great interest in the fire, and be a trifle irritable perhaps.

Those old mates of our father's are getting few and far between, and only happen along once in a way to keep the old man's memory fresh, as it were. We met one to-day, and had a yarn with him, and afterwards we got thinking, and somehow began to wonder whether those ancient friends of ours were, or were not, better and kinder to their mates than we of the rising generation are to our fathers; and the doubt is painfully on the wrong side.

SETTLING ON THE LAND

THE worst bore in Australia just now is the man who raves about getting the people on the land, and button-holes you in the street with a little scheme of his own. He generally does not know what he is talking about.

There is in Sydney a man named Tom Hopkins who settled on the land once, and sometimes you can get him to talk about it. He did very well at his trade in the city, years ago, until he began to think that he could do better up-country. Then he arranged with his sweetheart to be true to him and wait whilst he went West and made a home. She drops out of the story at this point.

He selected on a run at Dry Hole Creek, and for months awaited the arrival of the Government surveyors to fix his boundaries; but they didn't come, and, as he had no reason to believe they would turn up within the next ten years, he grubbed and fenced at a venture, and started farming operations.

Does the reader know what grubbing means? Tom does. He found the biggest, ugliest, and most useless trees on his particular piece of ground; also the greatest number of adamantine stumps. He

started without experience, or with very little, but with plenty of advice from men who knew less about farming than he did. He found a soft place between two roots on one side of the first tree, made a narrow, irregular hole, and burrowed down till he reached a level where the tap-root was somewhat less than four feet in diameter, and not quite as hard as flint; then he found that he hadn't room to swing the axe, so he heaved out another ton or two of earth—and rested. Next day he sank a shaft on the other side of the gum; and after tea, over a pipe, it struck him that it would be a good idea to burn the tree out, and so use up the logs and lighter rubbish lying round. So he widened the excavation, rolled in some logs, and set fire to them—with no better result than to scorch the roots.

Tom persevered. He put the trace harness on his horse, drew in all the logs within half a mile, and piled them on the windward side of that gum; and during the night the fire found a soft place, and the tree burnt off about six feet above the surface, falling on a squatter's boundary fence, and leaving the ugliest kind of stump to occupy the selector's attention; which it did, for a week. He waited till the hole cooled, and then he went to work with pick, shovel, and axe: and even now he gets interested in drawings of machinery, such as are published in the agricultural weeklies, for getting out stumps without graft. He thought he would

be able to get some posts and rails out of that tree, but found reason to think that a cast-iron column would split sooner—and straighter. He traced some of the surface roots to the other side of the selection, and broke most of his trace-chains trying to get them out by horse-power—for they had other roots going down from underneath. He cleared a patch in the course of time, and for several seasons he broke more plough-shares than he could pay for.

Meanwhile the squatter was not idle. Tom's tent was robbed several times, and his hut burnt down twice. Then he was charged with killing some sheep and a steer on the run, and converting them to his own use, but got off mainly because there was a difference of opinion between the squatter and the other local J.P. concerning politics and religion.

Tom ploughed and sowed wheat, but nothing came up to speak of—the ground was too poor; so he carted stable manure six miles from the nearest town, manured the land, sowed another crop, and prayed for rain. It came. It raised a flood which washed the crop clean off the selection, together with several acres of manure, and a considerable portion of the original surface soil; and the water brought down enough sand to make a beach, and spread it over the field to a depth of six inches. The flood also took half a mile of fencing from along the creek bank, and landed it

in a bend, three miles down, on a dummy selection, where it was confiscated.

Tom didn't give up—he was energetic. He cleared another piece of ground on the siding, and sowed more wheat; it had the rust in it, or the smut—and averaged three shillings per bushel. Then he sowed lucerne and oats, and bought a few cows: he had an idea of starting a dairy. First, the cows' eyes got bad, and he sought the advice of a German cockie, and acted upon it; he blew powdered alum through paper tubes into the bad eyes, and got some of it snorted and butted back into his own. He cured the cows' eyes and got the sandy blight in his own, and for a week or so he couldn't tell one end of a cow from the other, but sat in a dark corner of the hut and groaned, and soaked his glued eyelashes in warm water. Germany stuck to him and nursed him, and saw him through.

Then the milkers got bad udders, and Tom took his life in his hands whenever he milked them. He got them all right presently—and butter fell to fourpence a pound. He and the aforesaid cockie made arrangements to send their butter to a better market; and then the cows contracted a disease which was known in those parts as "plooro permoanyer," but generally referred to as "th' ploorer."

Again Tom sought advice, acting upon which he slit the cows' ears, cut their tails half off to bleed them, and poured pints of "pain killer" into them

through their nostrils; but they wouldn't make an effort, except, perhaps, to rise and poke the selector when he tried to tempt their appetites with slices of immature pumpkin. They died peacefully and persistently, until all were gone save a certain dangerous, barren, slab-sided luny bovine with white eyes and much agility in jumping fences, who was known locally as Queen Elizabeth.

Tom shot Queen Elizabeth, and turned his attention to agriculture again. Then his plough-horses took bad with something the Teuton called "der shtranguls." He submitted them to a course of treatment in accordance with Jacob's advice—and they died.

Even then Tom didn't give in—there was grit in that man. He borrowed a broken-down dray-horse in return for its keep, coupled it with his own old riding hack, and started to finish ploughing. The team wasn't a success. Whenever the draught horse's knees gave way and he stumbled forward, he jerked the lighter horse back into the plough, and something would break. Then Tom would blaspheme till he was refreshed, mend up things with wire and bits of clothes-line, fill his pockets with stones to throw at the team, and start again. Finally he hired a dummy's child to drive the horses. The brat did his best: he tugged at the head of the team, prodded it behind, heaved rocks at it, cut a sapling, got up his enthusiasm, and wildly whacked the light horse whenever the other

showed signs of moving—but he never succeeded in starting both horses at one and the same time. Moreover, the youth was cheeky, and the selector's temper had been soured: he cursed the boy along with the horses, the plough, the selection, the squatter, and Australia. Yes, he cursed Australia. The boy cursed back, was chastised, and immediately went home and brought his father.

Then the dummy's dog tackled the selector's dog, and this precipitated things. The dummy would have gone under had his wife not arrived on the scene with the eldest son and the rest of the family. They all fell foul of Tom. The woman was the worst. The selector's dog chawed the other and came to his master's rescue just in time—or Tom Hopkins would never have lived to become the inmate of a lunatic asylum.

Next year there happened to be good grass on Tom's selection and nowhere else, and he thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to get a few poor sheep, and fatten them up for market: sheep were selling for about seven-and-sixpence a dozen at that time. Tom got a hundred or two, but the squatter had a man stationed at one side of the selection with dogs to set on the sheep directly they put their noses through the fence (Tom's was not a sheep fence). The dogs chased the sheep across the selection and into the run again on the other side, where another man waited ready to pound them.

Tom's dog did his best; but he fell sick while

chawing up the fourth capitalistic canine, and subsequently died. The dummies had rubbed that cur with poison before starting it across—that was the only way they could get at Tom's dog.

Tom thought that two might play at the game, and he tried; but his nephew, who happened to be up from the city on a visit, was arrested at the instigation of the squatter for alleged sheep-stealing, and sentenced to two years' hard; during which time the selector himself got six months for assaulting the squatter with intent to do him grievous bodily harm—which, indeed, he more than attempted, if a broken nose, a fractured jaw, and the loss of most of the squatter's teeth amounted to anything. The squatter by this time had made peace with the other local Justice, and had become his father-in-law.

When Tom came out there was little left for him to live for; but he took a job of fencing, got a few pounds together, and prepared to settle on the land some more. He got a "missus" and a few cows during the next year; the missus robbed him and ran away with the dummy, and the cows died in the drought, or were impounded by the squatter while on their way to water. Then Tom rented an orchard up the creek, and a hailstorm destroyed all the fruit. Germany happened to be represented at the time, Jacob having sought shelter at Tom's hut on his way home from town. Tom stood leaning against the door-post with the hail beating on him through

it all. His eyes were very bright and very dry, and every breath was a choking sob. Jacob let him stand there, and sat inside with a dreamy expression on his hard face, thinking of childhood and Fatherland, perhaps. When it was over he led Tom to a stool and said, "You waits there, Tom. I must go home for somedings. You sits there still and waits twenty minutes;" then he got on his horse and rode off muttering to himself: "Dot man moost gry, dot man moost gry." He was back inside of twenty minutes with a bottle of wine and a cornet under his overcoat. He poured the wine into two pint pots, made Tom drink, drank himself, and then took his cornet, stood up at the door, and played a German march into the rain after the retreating storm. The hail had passed over his vineyard and he was a ruined man too. Tom did "gry" and was all right. He was a bit disheartened, but he did another job of fencing, and was just beginning to think about "puttin' in a few vines an' fruit trees" when the Government surveyors—whom he'd forgotten all about—had a resurrection and came and surveyed, and found that the real selection was located amongst some barren ridges across the creek. Tom reckoned it was lucky he didn't plant the orchard, and he set about shifting his home and fences to the new site. But the squatter interfered at this point, entered into possession of the farm and all on it, and took action against the selector for trespass—laying the damages at £2500.

Tom was admitted to the lunatic asylum at Parramatta next year, and the squatter was sent there the following summer, having been ruined by the drought, the rabbits, the banks, and a wool-ring. The two became very friendly, and had many a sociable argument about the feasibility—or otherwise—of blowing open the floodgates of heaven in a dry season with dynamite.

Tom was discharged a few years since. He knocks about certain suburbs a good deal. He is seen in daylight seldom, and at night mostly in connection with a dray and a lantern. He says his one great regret is that he wasn't found to be of unsound mind before he went up-country.

STIFFNER AND JIM

(THIRDLY, BILL)

WE were tramping down in Canterbury, Maoriland, at the time, swagging it—me and Bill—looking for work on the new railway line. Well, one afternoon, after a long, hot tramp, we comes to Stiffner's Hotel—between Christchurch and that other place—I forget the name of it—with throats on us like sun-struck bones, and not the price of a stick of tobacco.

We had to have a drink, anyway, so we chanced it. We walked right into the bar, handed over our swags, put up four drinks, and tried to look as if we'd just drawn our cheques and didn't care a curse for any man. We looked solvent enough, as far as swagmen go. We were dirty and haggard and ragged and tired-looking, and that was all the more reason why we might have our cheques all right.

This Stiffner was a hard customer. He'd been a spieler, fighting man, bush parson, temperance preacher, and a policeman, and a commercial traveller, and everything else that was damnable; he'd been a journalist, and an editor; he'd been a lawyer, too. He was an ugly brute to look at, and

uglier to have a row with—about six-foot-six, wide in proportion, and stronger than Donald Dinnie.

He was meaner than a gold-field Chinaman, and sharper than a sewer rat: he wouldn't give his own father a feed, nor lend him a sprat—unless some safe person backed the old man's I O U.

We knew that we needn't expect any mercy from Stiffner; but something had to be done, so I said to Bill:

"Something's got to be done, Bill! What do you think of it?"

Bill was mostly a quiet young chap, from Sydney, except when he got drunk—which was seldom—and then he was a lively customer from all round. He was cracked on the subject of spielers. He held that the population of the world was divided into two classes—one was spielers and the other was mugs. He reckoned that he wasn't a mug. At first I thought that he was a spieler, and afterwards I thought that he was a mug. He used to say that a man had to do it these times; that he was honest once and a fool, and was robbed and starved in consequence by his friends and relations; but now he intended to take all that he could get. He said that you either had to have or be had; that men were driven to be sharps, and there was no help for it.

Bill said:

"We'll have to sharpen our teeth, that's all, and chew somebody's lug."

"How?" I asked.

There was a lot of navvies at the pub, and I knew one or two by sight, so Bill says:

"You know one or two of these mugs. Bite one of their ears."

So I took aside a chap that I knowed and bit his ear for ten bob, and gave it to Bill to mind, for I thought it would be safer with him than with me.

"Hang on to that," I says, "and don't lose it for your natural life's sake, or Stiffner'll stiffen us."

We put up about nine bob's worth of drinks that night—me and Bill—and Stiffner didn't squeal: he was too sharp. He shouted once or twice.

By-and-by I left Bill and turned in, and in the morning when I woke up there was Bill sitting alongside of me, and looking about as lively as the fighting kangaroo in London in fog time. He had a black eye and eighteen-pence. He'd been taking down some of the mugs.

"Well, what's to be done now?" I asked. "Stiffner can smash us both with one hand, and if we don't pay up he'll pound our swags and cripple us. He's just the man to do it. He loves a fight even more than he hates being had."

"There's only one thing to be done, Jim," says Bill, in a tired, disinterested tone that made me mad.

"Well, what's that?" I said.

"Smoke!"

"Smoke be damned," I snarled, losing my temper. "You know dashed well that our swags are in the bar, and we can't smoke without them."

"Well, then," says Bill, "I'll toss you to see who's to face the landlord."

"Well, I'll be blessed!" I says. "I'll see you further first. You have got a front. You mugged that stuff away, and you'll have to get us out of the mess."

It made him wild to be called a mug, and we swore and growled at each other for a while; but we daren't speak loud enough to have a fight, so at last I agreed to toss up for it, and I lost.

Bill started to give me some of his points, but I shut him up quick.

"You've had your turn, and made a mess of it," I said. "For God's sake give me a show. Now, I'll go into the bar and ask for the swags, and carry them out on to the verandah, and then go back to settle up. You keep him talking all the time. You dump the two swags together, and smoke like sheol. That's all you've got to do."

I went into the bar, got the swags from the missus, carried them out on to the verandah, and then went back.

Stiffner came in.

"Good morning!"

"Good morning, sir," says Stiffner.

"It'll be a nice day, I think?"

"Yes, I think so. I suppose you are going on?"

"Yes, we'll have to make a move to-day." Then

I hooked carelessly on to the counter with one elbow, and looked dreamy-like out across the clearing, and presently I gave a sort of sigh and said: "Ah, well! I think I'll have a beer."

"Right you are! Where's your mate?"

"Oh, he's round at the back. He'll be round directly; but he ain't drinking this morning."

Stiffner laughed that nasty empty laugh of his. He thought Bill was whipping the cat.

"What's yours, boss?" I said.

"Thankee! . . . Here's luck!"

"Here's luck!"

The country was pretty open round there—the nearest timber was better than a mile away, and I wanted to give Bill a good start across the flat before the go-as-you-can commenced; so I talked for a while, and while we were talking I thought I might as well go the whole hog—I might as well die for a pound as a penny, if I had to die; and if I hadn't I'd have the pound to the good, anyway, so to speak. Anyhow, the risk would be about the same, or less, for I might have the spirit to run harder the more I had to run for—the more spirits I had to run for, in fact, as it turned out—so I says:

"I think I'll take one of them there flasks of whisky to last us on the road."

"Right y'are," says Stiffner. "What'll yer have—a small one or a big one?"

"Oh, a big one, I think—if I can get it into my pocket."

"It'll be a tight squeeze," he said, and he laughed.

"I'll try," I said. "Bet you two drinks I'll get it in."

"Done!" he says. "The top inside coat pocket, and no tearing."

It was a big bottle, and all my pockets were small; but I got it into the pocket he'd betted against. It was a tight squeeze, but I got it in.

Then we both laughed, but his laugh was nastier than usual, because it was meant to be pleasant, and he'd lost two drinks; and my laugh wasn't easy—I was anxious as to which of us would laugh next.

Just then I noticed something, and an idea struck me—about the most up-to-date idea that ever struck me in my life. I noticed that Stiffner was limping on his right foot this morning, so I said to him:

"What's up with your foot?" putting my hand in my pocket.

"Oh, it's a crimson nail in my boot," he said. "I thought I got the blanky thing out this morning; but I didn't."

There just happened to be an old bag of shoemaker's tools in the bar, belonging to an old cobbler who was lying dead drunk on the verandah. So I said, taking my hand out of my pocket again:

"Lend us the boot, and I'll fix it in a minute. That's my old trade."

"Oh, so you're a shoemaker," he said. "I'd never have thought it."

He laughs one of his useless laughs that wasn't

wanted, and slips off the boot—he hadn't laced it up—and hands it across the bar to me. It was an ugly brute—a great thick, iron-bound, boiler-plated navvy's boot. It made me feel sore when I looked at it.

I got the bag and pretended to fix the nail; but I didn't.

"There's a couple of nails gone from the sole," I said. "I'll put 'em in if I can find any hobnails, and it'll save the sole," and I rooted in the bag and found a good long nail, and shoved it right through the sole on the sly. He'd been a bit of a sprinter in his time, and I thought it might be better for me in the near future if the spikes of his running-shoes were inside.

"There, you'll find that better, I fancy," I said, standing the boot on the bar counter, but keeping my hand on it in an absent-minded kind of way. Presently I yawned and stretched myself, and said in a careless way:

"Ah, well! How's the slate?"

He scratched the back of his head and pretended to think.

"Oh, well, we'll call it thirty bob."

Perhaps he thought I'd slap down two quid.

"Well," I says, "and what will you do supposing we don't pay you?"

He looked blank for a moment. Then he fired up and gasped and choked once or twice; and then he cooled down suddenly and laughed his nastiest

laugh—he was one of those men who always laugh when they're wild — and said in a nasty, quiet tone:

"You thundering, jumped-up crawlers! If you don't (something) well part up I'll take your swags and (something) well kick your gory pants so you won't be able to sit down for a month—or stand up either!"

"Well, the sooner you begin the better," I said; and I chucked the boot into a corner and bolted.

He jumped the bar counter, got his boot, and came after me. He paused to slip the boot on—but he only made one step, and then gave a howl and slung the boot off and rushed back. When I looked round again he'd got a slipper on, and was coming—and gaining on me, too. I shifted scenery pretty quick the next five minutes. But I was soon pumped. My heart began to beat against the ceiling of my head, and my lungs all choked up in my throat. When I guessed he was getting within kicking distance I glanced round so's to dodge the kick. He let out; but I shied just in time. He missed fire, and the slipper went about twenty feet up in the air and fell in a waterhole.

He was done then, for the ground was stubbly and stony. I seen Bill on ahead pegging out for the horizon, and I took after him and reached for the timber for all I was worth, for I'd seen Stiffner's missus coming with a shovel—to bury the remains,

I suppose; and those two were a good match—Stiffner and his missus, I mean.

Bill looked round once, and melted into the bush pretty soon after that. When I caught up he was about done; but I grabbed my swag and we pushed on, for I told Bill that I'd seen Stiffner making for the stables when I'd last looked round; and Bill thought that we'd better get lost in the bush as soon as ever we could, and stay lost, too, for Stiffner was a man that couldn't stand being had.

The first thing that Bill said when we got safe into camp was: "I told you that we'd pull through all right. You need never be frightened when you're travelling with me. Just take my advice and leave things to me, and we'll hang out all right. Now——"

But I shut him up. He made me mad.

"Why, you—! What the sheol did *you* do?"

"Do?" he says. "I got away with the swags, didn't I? Where'd they be now if it wasn't for me?"

Then I sat on him pretty hard for his pretensions, and paid him out for all the patronage he'd worked off on me, and called him a mug straight, and walked round him, so to speak, and blowed, and told him never to pretend to me again that he was a battler.

Then, when I thought I'd licked him into form, I cooled down and soaped him up a bit; but I never thought that he had three climaxes and a crisis in store for me.

He took it all pretty cool; he let me have my fling, and gave me time to get breath; then he leaned languidly over on his right side, shoved his left hand down into his left trouser pocket, and brought up a boot-lace, a box of matches, and nine-and-six.

As soon as I got the focus of it I gasped:

"Where the deuce did you get that?"

"I had it all along," he said, "but I seen at the pub that you had the show to chew a lug, so I thought we'd save it—nine-and-sixpences ain't picked up every day."

Then he leaned over on his left, went down into the other pocket, and came up with a piece of tobacco and half-a-sovereign. My eyes bulged out.

"Where the blazes did you get that from?" I yelled.

"That," he said, "was the half-quid you give me last night. Half-quids ain't to be thrown away these times; and, besides, I had a down on Stiffner, and meant to pay him out; I reckoned that if we wasn't sharp enough to take him down we hadn't any business to be supposed to be alive. Anyway I guessed we'd do it; and so we did—and got a bottle of whisky into the bargain."

Then he leaned back, tired-like, against the log, and dredged his upper left-hand waistcoat pocket, and brought up a sovereign wrapped in a pound-note. Then he waited for me to speak; but I

couldn't. I got my mouth open, but couldn't get it shut again.

"I got that out of the mugs last night, but I thought that we'd want it, and might as well keep it. Quids ain't so easily picked up nowadays; and, besides, we need stuff mor'n Stiffner does, and so——"

"And did he know you had the stuff?" I gasped.

"Oh yes, that's the fun of it. That's what made him so excited. He was in the parlour all the time I was playing. But we might as well have a drink!"

We did. I wanted it.

Bill turned in by-and-by, and looked like a sleeping innocent in the moonlight. I sat up late, and smoked, and thought hard, and watched Bill, and turned in, and thought till near daylight, and then went to sleep, and had a nightmare about it. I dreamed I chased Stiffner forty miles to buy his pub, and that Bill turned out to be his nephew.

Bill divvied up all right, and gave me half-a-crown over, but I didn't travel with him long after that. He was a decent young fellow as far as chaps go, and a good mate as far as mates go; but he was too far ahead for a peaceful, easy-going chap like me. It would have worn me out in a year to keep up to him.

THE MAN WHO FORGOT

"WELL, I dunno," said Tom Marshall—known as "The Oracle"—"I've heerd o' sich cases before: they ain't commin, but—I've heerd o' sich cases before," and he screwed up the left side of his face whilst he reflectively scraped his capacious right ear with the large blade of a pocket-knife.

They were sitting at the western end of the rouseabouts' hut, enjoying the breeze that came up when the sun went down, and smoking and yarning. The "case" in question was a wretchedly forlorn-looking specimen of the swag-carrying clan whom a boundary rider had found wandering about the adjacent plain, and had brought into the station. He was a small, scraggy man, painfully fair, with a big, baby-like head, vacant watery eyes, long thin hairy hands, that felt like pieces of damp seaweed, and an apologetic cringe-and-look-up-at-you manner. He professed to have forgotten who he was and all about himself.

The Oracle was deeply interested in this case, as indeed he was in anything else that "looked curious." He was a big, simple-minded shearer, with more heart than brains, more experience than sense, and more curiosity than either. It was a

wonder that he had not profited, even indirectly, by the last characteristic. His heart was filled with a kind of reverential pity for any one who was fortunate or unfortunate enough to possess an "affliction"; and amongst his mates had been counted a deaf man, a blind man, a poet, and a man who "had rats." Tom had dropped across them individually, when they were down in the world, and had befriended them, and studied them with great interest—especially the poet; and they thought kindly of him, and were grateful—except the individual with the rats, who reckoned Tom had an axe to grind—that he, in fact, wanted to cut his (Rat's) liver out as a bait for Darling cod—and so renounced the mateship.

It was natural, then, for The Oracle to take the present case under his wing. He used his influence with the boss to get the Mystery on "picking up," and studied him in spare time, and did his best to assist the poor hushed memory, which nothing the men could say or do seemed able to push further back than the day on which the stranger "kind o' woke up" on the plain, and found a swag beside him. The swag had been prospected and fossicked for a clue, but yielded none. The chaps were sceptical at first, and inclined to make fun of the Mystery; but Tom interfered, and intimated that if they were skunks enough to chyack or try on any of their "funny business" with a "pore afflicted chap," he (Tom) would be obliged to "perform." Most

of the men there had witnessed Tom's performance, and no one seemed ambitious to take a leading part in it. They preferred to be in the audience.

"Yes," reflected The Oracle, "it's a curious case, and I dare say some of them big doctors, like Morell Mackenzie, would be glad to give a thousand or two to get holt on a case like this."

"Done," cried Mitchell, the goat of the shed, "I'll go halves!—or stay, let's form a syndicate and work the Mystery."

Some of the rouseabouts laughed, but the joke fell as flat with Tom as any other joke.

"The worst of it is," said the Mystery himself, in the whine that was natural to him, and with a timid side look up at Tom—"the worst of it is I might be a lord or a duke, and don't know anything about it. I might be a rich man, with a lot of houses and money. I might be a lord."

The chaps guffawed.

"Wot'yer laughing at?" asked Mitchell. "I don't see anything unreasonable about it; he might be a lord as far as looks go. I've seen two."

"Yes," reflected Tom, ignoring Mitchell, "there's something in that; but then again, you see, you might be Jack the Ripper. Better let it slide, mate; let the dead past bury its dead. Start fresh with a clean sheet."

"But I don't even know my name, or whether I'm married or not," whined the outcast. "I might have a good wife and little ones."

"Better keep on forgetting, mate," Mitchell said, "and as for a name, that's nothing. I don't know mine, and I've had eight. There's plenty good names knocking round. I knew a man named Jim Smith that died. Take his name, it just suits you, and he ain't likely to call round for it; if he does, you can say you was born with it."

So they called him Smith, and soon began to regard him as a harmless lunatic and to take no notice of his eccentricities.

Great interest was taken in the case for a time, and even Mitchell put in his oar and tried all sort of ways to assist the Mystery in his weak, helpless, and almost pitiful endeavours to recollect who he was. A similar case happened to appear in the papers at this time, and the thing caught on to such an extent that The Oracle was moved to impart some advice from his store of wisdom.

"I wouldn't think too much over it if I was you,' said he to Mitchell, "hundreds of sensible men went mad over that there Tichborne case who didn't have anything to do with it, but just through thinking on it; and you're ratty enough already, Jack. Let it alone and trust me to find out who's Smith just as soon as ever we cut out."

Meanwhile Smith ate, worked, and slept, and borrowed tobacco and forgot to return it—which was made a note of. He talked freely about his case when asked, but if he addressed any one, it was with the air of the timid but good young man, who is

fully aware of the extent and power of this world's wickedness, and stands somewhat in awe of it, but yet would beg you to favour a humble worker in the vineyard by kindly accepting a tract, and passing it on to friends after perusal.

One Saturday morning, about a fortnight before cut-out, The Oracle came late to his stand, and apparently with something on his mind. Smith hadn't turned up, and the next rouseabout was doing his work, to the mutual dissatisfaction of all parties immediately concerned.

"Did you see anything of Smith?" asked Mitchell of The Oracle. "Seems to have forgot to get up this morning."

Tom looked disheartened and disappointed.

"*He's forgot again,*" said he, slowly and impressively.

"Forgot what? We know he's blessed well forgot to come to graft."

"He's forgot again," repeated Tom. "He woke up this morning and wanted to know who he was and where he was." Comments.

"Better give him best, Oracle," said Mitchell presently. "If he can't find out who he is and where he is, the boss'll soon find it out for him."

"No," said Tom, "when I take a thing in hand I see it through."

This was also characteristic of the Boss-over-the-board, though in another direction. He went down to the hut and inquired for Smith.

"Why ain't you at work?"

"Who am I, sir? Where am I?" whined Smith. "Can you please tell me who I am and where I am?"

The boss drew a long breath and stared blankly at the Mystery; then he erupted.

"Now, look here!" he howled, "I don't know who the gory sheol you are, except that you're a gory lunatic, and what's more, I don't care a damn. But I'll soon show you *where* you are! You can call up at the store and get your cheque, and soon as you blessed well like; and then take a walk, and don't forget to take your lovely swag with you."

The matter was discussed at the dinner table. The Oracle swore that it was a cruel, mean way to treat a "pore afflicted chap," and cursed the boss. Tom's admirers cursed in sympathy, and trouble seemed threatening, when the voice of Mitchell was heard to rise in slow, deliberate tones over the clatter of cutlery and tin plates.

"I wonder," said the voice, "I wonder whether Smith forgot his cheque?"

It was ascertained that Smith hadn't.

There was some eating and thinking done.

Soon Mitchell's voice was heard again, directed at The Oracle. It said:

"Do you keep any vallabels about your bunk, Oracle?"

Tom looked hard at Mitchell. "Why?"

"Oh, nothin': only I think it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to look at your bunk and see whether Smith forgot."

The chaps grew awfully interested. They fixed their eyes on Tom, and he looked with feeling from one face to another; then he pushed his plate back, and slowly extracted his long legs from between the stool and the table. He climbed to his bunk, and carefully reviewed the ingredients of his swag. Smith hadn't forgot.

When The Oracle's face came round again there was in it a strange expression which a close study would have revealed to be more of anger than of sorrow, but that was not all. It was an expression such as a man might wear who is undergoing a terrible operation, without chloroform, but is determined not to let a whimper escape him. Tom didn't swear, and by that token they guessed how mad he was. 'Twas a rough shed, with a free and lurid vocabulary, but had they all sworn in chorus, with One-Eyed Bogan as lead, it would not have done justice to Tom's feelings—and they realised this.

The Oracle took down his bridle from its peg, and started for the door amid a respectful and sympathetic silence, which was only partly broken once by the voice of Mitchell, which asked in an awed whisper:

"Going ter ketch yer horse, Tom?"

The Oracle nodded, and passed on; he spake no word—he was too full for words.

Five minutes passed, and then the voice of Mitchell was heard again, uninterrupted by the clatter of tinware. It said in impressive tones:

"It would not be a bad idea for some of you chaps that camp in the bunks along there, to have a look at your things. Scotty's bunk is next to Tom's."

Scotty shot out of his place as if a snake had hold of his leg, starting a plank in the table and upsetting three soup plates. He reached for his bunk like a drowning man clutching at a plank, and tore out the bedding. Again, Smith hadn't forgot.

Then followed a general overhaul, and it was found that in most cases Smith had remembered. The pent-up reservoir of blasphemy burst forth.

The Oracle came up with Smith that night at the nearest shanty, and found that he had forgotten again, and in several instances, and was forgetting some more under the influence of rum and of the flattering interest taken in his case by a drunken Bachelor of Arts who happened to be at the pub. Tom came in quietly from the rear, and crooked his finger at the shanty-keeper. They went apart from the rest, and talked together awhile very earnestly. Then they secretly examined Smith's swag, the core of which was composed of Tom's and his mates' valuables.

Then The Oracle stirred up Smith's recollection and departed.

Smith was about again in a couple of weeks. He was damaged somewhat physically, but his memory was no longer impaired.

HIS COUNTRY—AFTER ALL

THE Blenheim coach was descending into the valley of the Avetere River—pronounced Aveterry—from the saddle of Taylor's Pass. Across the river to the right, the grey slopes and flats stretched away to the distant sea from a range of tussock hills. There was no native bush there; but there were several groves of imported timber standing wide apart—sentinel-like—seeming lonely and striking in their isolation.

"Grand country, New Zealand, eh?" said a stout man with a brown face, grey beard, and grey eyes, who sat between the driver and another passenger on the box.

"You don't call this grand country!" exclaimed the other passenger, who claimed to be, and looked like, a commercial traveller, and might have been a professional spieler—quite possibly both. "Why, it's about the poorest country in New Zealand! You ought to see some of the country in the North Island—Wairarapa and Napier districts, round about Pahiatua. I call this damn poor country."

"Well, I reckon you wouldn't, if you'd ever been in Australia—back in New South Wales. The people here don't seem to know what a grand

country they've got. You say this is the worst, eh? Well, this would make an Australian cockatoo's mouth water—the worst of New Zealand would."

"I always thought Australia was all good country," mused the driver—a flax-stick. "I always thought——"

"Good country!" exclaimed the man with the grey beard, in a tone of disgust. "Why, it's only a mongrel desert, except some bits round the coast. The worst dried-up and God-forsaken country I was ever in."

There was a silence, thoughtful on the driver's part, and aggressive on that of the stranger.

"I always thought," said the driver reflectively, after the pause—"I always thought Australia was a good country," and he placed his foot on the brake.

They let him think. The coach descended the natural terraces above the river bank, and pulled up at the pub.

. . . . . .

"So you're a native of Australia?" said the bagman to the grey-beard, as the coach went on again.

"Well, I suppose I am. Anyway, I was born there. That's the main thing I've got against the darned country."

"How long did you stay there?"

"Till I got away," said the stranger. Then, after a think, he added, "I went away first when I was thirty-five—went to the islands. I swore I'd never go back to Australia again; but I did. I thought

I had a kind of affection for old Sydney. I knocked about the blasted country for five or six years, and then I cleared out to 'Frisco. I swore I'd never go back again, and I never will."

"But surely you'll take a run over and have a look at old Sydney and those places, before you go back to America, after getting so near?"

"What the blazes do I want to have a look at the blamed country for?" snapped the stranger, who had refreshed considerably. "I've got nothing to thank Australia for—except getting out of it. It's the best country to get out of that I was ever in."

"Oh, well, I only thought you might have had some friends over there," interposed the traveller in an injured tone.

"Friends! That's another reason. I wouldn't go back there for all the friends and relations since Adam. I had more than quite enough of it while I was there. The worst and hardest years of my life were spent in Australia. I might have starved there, and did do it half my time. I worked harder and got less in my own country in five years than I ever did in any other in fifteen"—he was getting mixed—"and I've been in a few since then. No, Australia is the worst country that ever the Lord had the sense to forget. I mean to stick to the country that stuck to me, when I was starved out of my own dear native land—and that country is the United States of America. What's Australia?

A big, thirsty, hungry wilderness, with one or two cities for the convenience of foreign speculators, and a few collections of humpies, called towns—also for the convenience of foreign speculators; and populated mostly by mongrel sheep, and partly by fools, who live like European slaves in the towns, and like dingoes in the bush—who drivel about "democracy," and yet haven't any more spunk than to graft for a few cockney dudes that razzle-dazzle most of the time in Paris. Why, the Australians haven't even got the grit to claim enough of their own money to throw a few dams across their watercourses, and so make some of the interior fit to live in. America's bad enough, but it was never so small as that. . . . Bah! The curse of Australia is sheep, and the Australian war-cry is Baa!"

"Well, you're the first man I ever heard talk as you've been doing about his own country," said the bagman, getting tired and impatient of being sat on all the time. "'Lives there a man with a soul so dead, who never said—to—to himself' . . . I forget the darned thing."

He tried to remember it. The man whose soul was dead cleared his throat for action, and the driver —for whom the bagman had shouted twice as against the stranger's once—took the opportunity to observe that he always thought a man ought to stick up for his own country.

The stranger ignored him, and opened fire on the bagman. He proceeded to prove that that was all

rot—that patriotism was the greatest curse on earth; that it had been the cause of all war; that it was the false, ignorant sentiment which moved men to slave, starve, and fight for the comfort of their sluggish masters; that it was the enemy of universal brotherhood, the mother of hatred, murder, and slavery, and that the world would never be any better until the deadly poison, called the sentiment of patriotism, had been "educated" out of the stomachs of the people. "Patriotism!" he exclaimed scornfully. "My country! The darned fools; the country never belonged to them, but to the speculators, the absentees, land-boomers, swindlers, gangs of thieves—the men the patriotic fools starve and fight for—their masters. Ba-a!"

The opposition collapsed.

The coach had climbed the terraces on the south side of the river, and was bowling along on a level stretch of road across the elevated flat.

"What trees are those?" asked the stranger, breaking the aggressive silence which followed his unpatriotic argument, and pointing to a grove ahead by the roadside. "They look as if they've been planted there. There ain't been a forest here surely?"

"Oh, they're some trees the Government imported," said the traveller, whose knowledge on the subject was limited. "Our own bush won't grow in this soil."

"But it looks as if anything else would——"

Here the stranger sniffed once by accident, and then several times with interest. It was a warm morning after rain. He fixed his eyes on those trees.

They didn't look like Australian gums; they tapered to the tops, the branches were pretty regular, and the boughs hung in ship-shape fashion. There was not the Australian heat to twist the branches and turn the leaves.

"Why!" exclaimed the stranger, still staring and sniffing hard. "Why, dang me if they ain't (sniff) Australian gums!"

"Yes," said the driver, flicking his horses, "they are."

"Blanky (sniff) blanky old Australian gums!" exclaimed the ex-Australian, with strange enthusiasm.

"They're not old," said the driver; "they're only young trees. But they say they don't grow like that in Australia—'count of the difference in the climate. I always thought——"

But the other did not appear to hear him; he kept staring hard at the trees they were passing. They had been planted in rows and cross-rows, and were coming on grandly.

There was a rabbit-trapper's camp amongst those trees; he had made a fire to boil his billy with gum leaves and twigs, and it was the scent of that fire which interested the exile's nose, and brought a wave of memories with it.

"Good day, mate!" he shouted suddenly to the rabbit-trapper, and to the astonishment of his fellow-passengers.

"Good day, mate!" The answer came back like an echo—it seemed to him—from the past.

Presently he caught sight of a few trees which had evidently been planted before the others—as an experiment, perhaps—and, somehow, one of them had grown after its own erratic native fashion—gnarled and twisted and ragged, and could not be mistaken for anything else but an Australian gum.

"A thunderin' old blue-gum!" ejaculated the traveller, regarding the tree with great interest.

He screwed his neck to get a last glimpse, and then sat silently smoking and gazing straight ahead, as if the past lay before him—and it *was* before him.

"Ah, well!" he said, in explanation of a long meditative silence on his part; "ah, well—them saplings—the smell of them gum leaves set me thinking." And he thought some more.

"Well, for my part," said a tourist in the coach presently, in a condescending tone, "I can't see much in Australia. The bally colonies are——"

"Oh, that be damned!" snarled the Australian-born—they had finished the second flask of whisky. "What do you Britishers know about Australia? She's as good as England anyway."

. . . . . .

"Well, I suppose you'll go straight back to the

States as soon as you've done your business in Christchurch," said the bagman, when near their journey's end they had become confidential.

"Well, I dunno. I reckon I'll just take a run over to Australia first. There's an old mate of mine in business in Sydney, and I'd like to have a yarn with him."

THE UNION BURIES ITS DEAD

WHILE out boating one Sunday afternoon on a billabong across the river, we saw a young man on horseback driving some horses along the bank. He said it was a fine day, and asked if the water was deep there. The joker of our party said it was deep enough to drown him, and he laughed and rode farther up. We didn't take much notice of him.

Next day a funeral gathered at a corner pub and asked each other in to have a drink while waiting for the hearse. They passed away some of the time dancing jigs to a piano in the bar parlour. They passed away the rest of the time sky-larking and fighting.

The defunct was a young union labourer, about twenty-five, who had been drowned the previous day while trying to swim some horses across a billabong of the Darling.

He was almost a stranger in town, and the fact of his having been a union man accounted for the funeral. The police found some union papers in his swag, and called at the General Labourers' Union Office for information about him. That's how we knew. The secretary had very little information to give. The departed was a "Roman," and the majority

of the town were otherwise—but unionism is stronger than creed. Drink, however, is stronger than unionism; and, when the hearse presently arrived, more than two-thirds of the funeral were unable to follow. They were too drunk.

The procession numbered fifteen, fourteen souls following the broken shell of a soul. Perhaps not one of the fourteen possessed a soul any more than the corpse did—but that doesn't matter.

Four or five of the funeral, who were boarders at the pub, borrowed a trap which the landlord used to carry passengers to and from the railway station. They were strangers to us who were on foot, and we to them. We were all strangers to the corpse.

A horseman, who looked like a drover just returned from a big trip, dropped into our dusty wake and followed us a few hundred yards, dragging his packhorse behind him, but a friend made wild and demonstrative signals from a hotel verandah—hooking at the air in front with his right hand and jobbing his left thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the bar—so the drover hauled off and didn't catch up to us any more. He was a stranger to the entire show.

We walked in twos. There were three twos. It was very hot and dusty; the heat rushed in fierce dazzling rays across every iron roof and light-coloured wall that was turned to the sun. One or two pubs closed respectfully until we got past. They closed their bar doors and the patrons went in and

out through some side or back entrance for a few minutes. Bushmen seldom grumble at an inconvenience of this sort, when it is caused by a funeral. They have too much respect for the dead.

On the way to the cemetery we passed three shearers sitting on the shady side of a fence. One was drunk—very drunk. The other two covered their right ears with their hats, out of respect for the departed—whoever he might have been—and one of them kicked the drunk and muttered something to him.

He straightened himself up, stared, and reached helplessly for his hat, which he shoved half off and then on again. Then he made a great effort to pull himself together—and succeeded. He stood up, braced his back against the fence, knocked off his hat, and remorsefully placed his foot on it—to keep it off his head till the funeral passed.

A tall, sentimental drover, who walked by my side, cynically quoted Byronic verses suitable to the occasion—to death—and asked with pathetic humour whether we thought the dead man's ticket would be recognised "over yonder." It was a G.L.U. ticket, and the general opinion was that it would be recognised.

Presently my friend said:

"You remember when we were in the boat yesterday, we saw a man driving some horses along the bank?"

"Yes."

He nodded at the hearse and said:

"Well, that's him."

I thought awhile.

"I didn't take any particular notice of him," I said. "He said something, didn't he?"

"Yes; said it was a fine day. You'd have taken more notice if you'd known that he was doomed to die in the hour, and that those were the last words he would say to any man in this world."

"To be sure," said a full voice from the rear. "If ye'd known that, ye'd have prolonged the conversation."

We plodded on across the railway line and along the hot, dusty road which ran to the cemetery, some of us talking about the accident, and lying about the narrow escapes we had had ourselves. Presently some one said:

"There's the Devil."

I looked up and saw a priest standing in the shade of the tree by the cemetery gate.

The hearse was drawn up and the tail-boards were opened. The funeral extinguished its right ear with its hat as four men lifted the coffin out and laid it over the grave. The priest—a pale, quiet young fellow—stood under the shade of a sapling which grew at the head of the grave. He took off his hat, dropped it carelessly on the ground, and proceeded to business. I noticed that one or two heathens winced slightly when the holy water was sprinkled on the coffin. The drops quickly evapo-

rated, and the little round black spots they left were soon dusted over; but the spots showed, by contrast, the cheapness and shabbiness of the cloth with which the coffin was covered. It seemed black before; now it looked a dusky grey.

Just here man's ignorance and vanity made a farce of the funeral. A big, bull-necked publican, with heavy, blotchy features, and a supremely ignorant expression, picked up the priest's straw hat and held it about two inches over the head of his reverence during the whole of the service. The father, be it remembered, was standing in the shade. A few shoved their hats on and off uneasily, struggling between their disgust for the living and their respect for the dead. The hat had a conical crown and a brim sloping down all round like a sunshade, and the publican held it with his great red claw spread over the crown. To do the priest justice, perhaps he didn't notice the incident. A stage priest or parson in the same position might have said, "Put the hat down, my friend; is not the memory of our departed brother worth more than my complexion?" A wattlebark layman might have expressed himself in stronger language, none the less to the point. But my priest seemed unconscious of what was going on. Besides, the publican was a great and important pillar of the Church. He couldn't, as an ignorant and conceited ass, lose such a good opportunity of asserting his faithfulness and importance to his Church.

The grave looked very narrow under the coffin, and I drew a breath of relief when the box slid easily down. I saw a coffin get stuck once, at Rookwood, and it had to be yanked out with difficulty, and laid on the sods at the feet of the heart-broken relations, who howled dismally while the grave-diggers widened the hole. But they don't cut contracts so fine in the West. Our grave-digger was not altogether bowelless, and, out of respect for that human quality described as "feelin's," he scraped up some light and dusty soil and threw it down to deaden the fall of the clay lumps on the coffin. He also tried to steer the first few shovelsful gently down against the end of the grave with the back of the shovel turned outwards, but the hard, dry Darling River clods rebounded and knocked all the same. It didn't matter much—nothing does. The fall of lumps of clay on a stranger's coffin doesn't sound any different from the fall of the same things on an ordinary wooden box—at least I didn't notice anything awesome or unusual in the sound; but, perhaps, one of us—the most sensitive—might have been impressed by being reminded of a burial of long ago, when the thump of every sod jolted his heart.

I have left out the wattle—because it wasn't there. I have also neglected to mention the heart-broken old mate, with his grizzled head bowed and great pearly drops streaming down his rugged cheeks. He was absent—he was probably "Out

Back." For similar reasons I have omitted reference to the suspicious moisture in the eyes of a bearded bush ruffian named Bill. Bill failed to turn up, and the only moisture was that which was induced by the heat. I have left out the "sad Australian sunset" because the sun was not going down at the time. The burial took place exactly at mid-day.

The dead bushman's name was Jim, apparently; but they found no portraits, nor locks of hair, nor any love letters, nor anything of that kind in his swag—not even a reference to his mother; only some papers relating to union matters. Most of us didn't know the name till we saw it on the coffin; we knew him as "that poor chap that got drowned yesterday."

"So his name's James Tyson," said my drover acquaintance, looking at the plate.

"Why! Didn't you know that before?" I asked.

"No; but I knew he was a union man."

It turned out, afterwards, that J. T. wasn't his real name—only "the name he went by."

Anyhow he was buried by it, and most of the "Great Australian Dailies" have mentioned in their brevity columns that a young man named James John Tyson was drowned in a billabong of the Darling last Sunday.

We did hear, later on, what his real name was; but if we ever chance to read it in the "Missing

Friends Column," we shall not be able to give any information to heart-broken Mother or Sister or Wife, nor to any one who could let him hear something to his advantage—for we have already forgotten the name.

MITCHELL DOESN'T BELIEVE IN THE SACK

"If ever I do get a job again," said Mitchell, "I'll stick to it while there's a hand's turn of work to do, and put a few pounds together. I won't be the fool I always was. If I'd had sense a couple of years ago, I wouldn't be tramping through this damned sand and mulga now. I'll get a job on a station, or at some toff's house, knocking about the stables and garden, and I'll make up my mind to settle down to graft for four or five years."

"But supposing you get the sack?" said his mate.

"I won't take it. Only for taking the sack I wouldn't be hard up to-day. The boss might come round and say:

"'I won't want you after this week, Mitchell. I haven't got any more work for you to do. Come up and see me at the office presently.'

"So I'll go up and get my money; but I'll be pottering round as usual on Monday, and come up to the kitchen for my breakfast. Some time in the day the boss'll be knocking round and see me.

"'Why, Mitchell,' he'll say, 'I thought you was gone.'

"'I didn't say I was going,' I'll say. 'Who told you that—or what made you think so?'

"'I thought I told you on Saturday that I wouldn't want you any more,' he'll say, a bit short. 'I haven't got enough work to keep a man going; I told you that; I thought you understood. *Didn't I give you the sack on Saturday?*'

"'It's no use;' I'll say, 'that sort of thing's played out. I've been had too often that way; I've been sacked once too often. Taking the sack's been the cause of all my trouble; I don't believe in it. If I'd never taken the sack I'd have been a rich man to-day; it might be all very well for horses, but it doesn't suit me; it doesn't hurt you, but it hurts me. I made up my mind that when I got a place to suit me, I'd stick in it. I'm comfortable here and satisfied, and you've had no cause to find fault with me. It's no use you trying to sack me, because I won't take it. I've been there before, and you might as well try to catch an old bird with chaff.'

"'Well, I won't pay you, and you'd better be off,' he'll say, trying not to grin.

"'Never mind the money,' I'll say, 'the bit of tucker won't cost you anything, and I'll find something to do round the house till you have some more work. I won't ask you for anything, and, surely to God I'll find enough to do to pay for my grub!'

"So I'll potter round and take things easy and

call up at the kitchen as usual at meal times, and by-and-by the boss'll think to himself: 'Well, if I've got to feed this chap I might as well get some work out of him.'

"So he'll find me something regular to do—a bit of fencing, or carpentering, or painting, or something, and then I'll begin to call up for my stuff again, as usual."

HIS FATHER'S MATE

It was Golden Gully still, but golden in name only, unless indeed the yellow mullock heaps or the bloom of the wattle trees on the hillside gave it a claim to the title. But the gold was gone from the gully, and the diggers were gone, too, after the manner of Timon's friends when his wealth deserted him. Golden Gully was a dreary place, dreary even for an abandoned goldfield. The poor, tortured earth, with its wounds all bare, seemed to make a mute appeal to the surrounding bush to come up and hide it, and, as if in answer to its appeal, the shrub and saplings were beginning to close in from the foot of the range. The wilderness was reclaiming its own again.

The two dark, sullen hills that stood on each side were clothed from tip to hollow with dark scrub and scraggy box trees; but above the highest row of shafts on one side ran a line of wattle trees in full bloom.

The top of the western hill was shaped somewhat like a saddle, and standing high above the eucalypti on the point corresponding with the pommel were three tall pines—three lonely trees, seen for many miles around, that had caught the yellow rays of

many a setting sun long before the white man wandered over the ranges.

The predominant note of the scene was a painful sense of listening, that never seemed to lose its tension—a listening as though for the sounds of digger life, sounds that had gone and left a void that was accentuated by the signs of a former presence. The main army of diggers had long ago vanished to new rushes, leaving only its stragglers and deserters behind. These were men who were too poor to drag families about, men who were old and feeble, and men who had lost their faith in fortune. They had dropped unnoticed out of the ranks, and remained to scratch out a living among the abandoned claims.

Golden Gully had its little community of fossickers who lived at the foot of the gully in a clearing, called Spencer's Flat on one side and Pounding Flat on the other, but they lent no life to the scene; they only haunted it. A stranger might have thought the field entirely deserted until he came on a coat and a billy at the foot of saplings amongst the holes, and heard, in the shallow ground underneath, the thud of a pick, which told of some fossicker below rooting out what little wash remained.

One afternoon towards Christmas, a windlass was erected over an old shaft of considerable depth at the foot of the gully. A greenhide bucket attached to a rope on the windlass was lying next morning near the mouth of the shaft, and beside it, on a clear-swept patch, was a little mound of cool wet wash-dirt.

A clump of saplings near at hand threw a shade over part of the mullock heap, and in this shade, seated on an old coat, was a small boy of eleven or twelve years, writing on a slate.

He had fair hair, blue eyes, and a thin old-fashioned face—a face that would scarcely alter much as he grew to manhood. His costume consisted of a pair of moleskin trousers, a cotton shirt, and one suspender. He held the slate rigidly with a corner of its frame pressed close against his ribs, whilst his head hung to one side, so close to the slate that his straggling hair almost touched it. He was regarding his work fixedly out of the corners of his eyes, whilst he painfully copied down the head line, spelling it in a different way each time. In this laborious task he appeared to be greatly assisted by a tongue that lolled out of the corner of his mouth and made an occasional revolution round it, leaving a circle of temporarily clean face. His small clay-covered toes also entered into the spirit of the thing, and helped him not a little by their energetic wriggling. He paused occasionally to draw the back of his small brown arm across his mouth.

Little Isley Mason, or, as he was called, "His Father's Mate," had always been a general favourite with the diggers and fossickers, from the days when he used to slip out first thing in the morning and take a run across the frosty flat in his shirt. Long Bob Sawkins would often tell how Isley came home one morning from his run in the long, wet grass as naked

as he was born, with the information that he had lost his shirt.

Later on, when most of the diggers had gone, and Isley's mother was dead, he was to be seen about the place with bare, sun-browned arms and legs, a pick and shovel, and a gold dish, about two-thirds of his height in diameter, with which he used to go "a-speckin'" and "fossickin'" amongst the old mullock heaps. Long Bob was Isley's special crony, and he would often go out of his way to "lay the boy onter bits o' wash and likely spots," lamely excusing his long yarns with the child by the explanation that it was "amusin' to draw Isley out."

Isley had been sitting writing for some time when a deep voice called out from below:

"Isley!"

"Yes, father."

"Send down the bucket."

"Right."

Isley put down his slate, and going to the shaft dropped the bucket down as far as the slack rope reached; then, placing one hand on the bole of the windlass and holding the other against it underneath, he let it slip round between his palms until the bucket reached bottom. A sound of shovelling was heard for a few moments, and presently the voice cried, "Wind away, sonny."

"Thet ain't half enough," said the boy, peering down. "Don't be frightened to put it in, father. I kin wind up a lot mor'n thet."

A little more scraping, and the boy braced his feet well upon the little mound of clay which he had raised under the handle of the windlass to make up for his deficiency in stature.

"Now then, Isley!"

Isley wound slowly but sturdily, and soon the bucket of "wash" appeared above the surface; then he took it in short lifts and deposited it with the rest of the wash-dirt.

"Isley!" called his father again.

"Yes, father."

"Have you done that writing lesson yet?"

"Very near."

"Then send down the slate next time for some sums."

"All right."

The boy resumed his seat, fixed the corner of the slate well into his ribs, humped his back, and commenced another wavering line.

Tom Mason was known on the place as a silent, hard worker. He was a man of about sixty, tall, and dark bearded. There was nothing uncommon about his face, except, perhaps, that it had hardened, as the face of a man might harden who had suffered a long succession of griefs and disappointments. He lived in a little hut under a peppermint tree at the far edge of Pounding Flat. His wife had died there about six years before, and though new rushes broke out and he was well able to go, he never left Golden Gully.

Mason was kneeling in front of the "face," digging away by the light of a tallow candle stuck in the side. The floor of the drive was very wet, and his trousers were heavy and cold with clay and water; but the old digger was used to this sort of thing. His pick was not bringing out much to-day, however, for he seemed abstracted and would occasionally pause in his work, while his thoughts wandered far away from the narrow streak of wash-dirt in the "face."

He was digging out pictures from a past life. They were not pleasant ones, for his face was stony and white in the dim glow of the candle.

Thud, thud, thud—the blows became slower and more irregular as the fossicker's mind wandered off into the past. The sides of the drive seemed to vanish slowly away, and the "face" retreated far out beyond a horizon that was hazy in the glow of the Southern Ocean. He was standing on the deck of a ship and by his side stood a brother. They were sailing southward to the Land of Promise that was shining there in all its golden glory! The sails pressed forward in the bracing wind, and the clipper ship raced along with its burden of the wildest dreamers ever borne in a vessel's hull! Up over long blue ocean ridges, down into long blue ocean gullies; on to lands so new, and yet so old, where above the sunny glow of the southern skies blazed the shining names of Ballarat! and Bendigo! The deck seemed to lurch, and the fossicker fell forward

against the face of the drive. The shock recalled him, and he lifted his pick once more.

But the blows slacken again as another vision rises before him. It is Ballarat now. He is working in a shallow claim at Eureka, his brother by his side. The brother looks pale and ill, for he has been up all night dancing and drinking. Out behind them is the line of blue hills; in front is the famous Bakery Hill, and down to the left Golden Point. Two mounted troopers are riding up over Specimen Hill. What do they want?

They take the brother away, handcuffed. Manslaughter last night. Cause—drink and jealousy.

The vision is gone again. Thud, thud, goes the pick; it counts the years that follow—one, two, three, four, up to twenty, and then it stops for the next scene—a selection on the banks of a bright river in New South Wales. The little homestead is surrounded by vines and fruit trees. Many swarms of bees work under the shade of the trees, and a crop of wheat is nearly ripe on the hillside.

A man and a boy are engaged in clearing a paddock just below the homestead. They are father and son; the son, a boy of about seventeen, is the image of his father.

Horses' feet again! Here comes Nemesis in mounted troopers' uniform.

The mail was stuck up last night about five miles away, and a refractory passenger shot. The son had

been out "'possum shooting" all night with some friends.

The troopers take the son away handcuffed: "Robbery under arms."

The father was taking out a stump when the troopers came. His foot is still resting on the spade, which is half driven home. He watches the troopers take the boy up to the house, and then, driving the spade to its full depth, he turns up another sod. The troopers reach the door of the homestead; but still he digs steadily, and does not seem to hear his wife's cry of despair. The troopers search the boy's room and bring out some clothing in two bundles; but still the father digs. They have saddled up one of the farm horses and made the boy mount. The father digs. They ride off along the ridge with the boy between them. The father never lifts his eyes; the hole widens round the stump; he digs away till the brave little wife comes and takes him gently by the arm. He half rouses himself and follows her to the house like an obedient dog.

Trial and disgrace follow, and then other misfortunes, pleuro among the cattle, drought, and poverty.

Thud, thud, thud again! But it is not the sound of the fossicker's pick—it is the fall of sods on his wife's coffin.

It is a little bush cemetery, and he stands stonily watching them fill up her grave. She died of

a broken heart and shame. "I can't bear disgrace! I can't bear disgrace!" she had moaned all these six weary years—for the poor are often proud.

But *he* lives on, for it takes a lot to break a man's heart. He holds up his head and toils on for the sake of a child that is left, and that child is—Isley.

And now the fossicker seems to see a vision of the future. He seems to be standing somewhere, an old, old man, with a younger one at his side; the younger one has Isley's face. Horses' feet again! Ah, God! Nemesis once more in troopers' uniform!

The fossicker falls on his knees in the mud and clay at the bottom of the drive, and prays Heaven to take his last child ere Nemesis comes for him.

. . . . . .

Long Bob Sawkins had been known on the diggings as "Bob the Devil." His profile, at least from one side, certainly did recall that of the sarcastic Mephistopheles; but the other side, like his true character, was by no means a devil's. His physiognomy had been much damaged, and one eye removed by the premature explosion of a blast in some old Ballarat mine. The blind eye was covered with a green patch, which gave a sardonic appearance to the remaining features.

He was a stupid, heavy, good-natured English-

man. He stuttered a little, and had a peculiar habit of wedging the monosyllable "why" into his conversation at times when it served no other purpose than to fill up the pauses caused by his stuttering; but this by no means assisted him in his speech, for he often stuttered over the "why" itself.

The sun was getting low down, and its yellow rays reached far up among the saplings of Golden Gully when Bob appeared coming down by the path that ran under the western hill. He was dressed in the usual costume—cotton shirt, moleskin trousers, faded hat and waistcoat, and blucher boots. He carried a pick over his shoulder, the handle of which was run through the heft of a short shovel that hung down behind, and he had a big dish under his arm. He paused opposite the shaft with the windlass, and hailed the boy in his usual form of salutation.

"Look, see here, Isley!"

"What is it, Bob?"

"I seed a young—why—magpie up in the scrub, and yer oughter be able to catch it."

"Can't leave the shaft; father's b'low."

"How did yer father know there was any—why—wash in the old shaft?"

"Seed old Corney in town Saturday, 'n he said thur was enough to make it worth while balin' out. Bin balin' all the mornin'."

Bob came over, and letting his tools down with a

clatter he hitched up the knees of his moleskins and sat down on one heel.

"What are yer—why—doin' on the slate, Isley?" said he, taking out an old clay pipe and lighting it.

"Sums," said Isley.

Bob puffed away at his pipe a moment.

"'Tain't no use!" he said, sitting down on the clay and drawing his knees up. "Edication's a failyer."

"Listen at him!" exclaimed the boy. "D'yer mean ter say it ain't no use learnin' readin' and writin' and sums?"

"Isley!"

"Right, father."

The boy went to the windlass and let the bucket down. Bob offered to help him wind up, but Isley, proud of showing his strength to his friend, insisted on winding by himself.

"You'll be—why—a strong man some day, Isley," said Bob, landing the bucket.

"Oh, I could wind up a lot mor'n father puts in. Look how I greased the handles! It works like butter now," and the boy sent the handles spinning round with a jerk to illustrate his meaning.

"Why did they call yer Isley for?" queried Bob, as they resumed their seats. "It ain't yer real name, is it?"

"No, my name's Harry. A digger useter say I was a isle in the ocean to father 'n mother, 'n then I was nicknamed Isle, 'n then Isley."

"You hed a — why — brother once, didn't yer?"

"Yes, but thet was afore I was borned. He died, at least mother used ter say she didn't know if he was dead; but father says he's dead as fur's he's concerned."

"And your father hed a brother, too. Did yer ever—why—hear of him?"

"Yes, I heard father talkin' about it wonst to mother. I think father's brother got inter some row in a bar where a man was killed."

"And was yer—why—father—why—fond of him?"

"I heard father say that he was wonst, but thet was all past."

Bob smoked in silence for a while, and seemed to look at some dark clouds that were drifting along like a funeral out in the west. Presently he said half aloud something that sounded like "All, all—why—past."

"Eh?" said Isley.

"Oh, it's—why, why—nothin'," answered Bob, rousing himself. "Is that a paper in yer father's coat-pocket, Isley?"

"Yes," said the boy, taking it out.

Bob took the paper and stared hard at it for a moment or so.

"There's something about the new gold-fields there," said Bob, putting his finger on a tailor's advertisement. "I wish you'd—why—read it to

me, Isley; I can't see the small print they uses nowadays."

"No, thet's not it," said the boy, taking the paper, "it's something about——"

"Isley!"

"'Old on, Bob, father wants me."

The boy ran to the shaft, rested his hands and forehead against the bole of the windlass, and leant over to hear what his father was saying.

Without a moment's warning the treacherous bole slipped round; a small body bounded a couple of times against the sides of the shaft and fell at Mason's feet, where it lay motionless!

. . . . . .

"Mason!"

"Ay?"

"Put him in the bucket and lash him to the rope with your belt!"

A few moments, and—

"Now, Bob!"

Bob's trembling hands would scarcely grasp the handle, but he managed to wind somehow.

Presently the form of the child appeared, motionless, and covered with clay and water. Mason was climbing up by the steps in the side of the shaft.

Bob tenderly unlashed the boy and laid him under the saplings on the grass; then he wiped some of the clay and blood away from the child's forehead, and dashed over him some muddy water.

Presently Isley gave a gasp and opened his eyes.

"Are yer—why—hurt much, Isley?" asked Bob.

"Ba—back's bruk, Bob!"

"Not so bad as that, old man."

"Where's father?"

"Coming up."

Silence awhile, and then—

"Father! father! be quick, father!"

Mason reached the surface and came and knelt by the other side of the boy.

"I'll, I'll—why—run fur some brandy," said Bob.

"No use, Bob," said Isley. "I'm all bruk up."

"Don't yer feel better, sonny?"

"No—I'm—goin' to—die, Bob."

"Don't say it, Isley," groaned Bob.

A short silence, and then the boy's body suddenly twisted with pain. But it was soon over. He lay still awhile, and then said quietly:

"Good-bye, Bob!"

Bob made a vain attempt to speak. "Isley!" he said, "——."

The child turned and stretched out his hands to the silent, stony-faced man on the other side.

"Father—father, I'm goin'!"

A shuddering groan broke from Mason's lips, and then all was quiet.

Bob had taken off his hat to wipe his forehead, and his face, in spite of its disfigurement, was strangely like the face of the stone-like man opposite.

For a moment they looked at one another across the body of the child, and then Bob said quietly:

"He never knowed."

"What does it matter?" said Mason gruffly; and, taking up the dead child, he walked towards the hut.

It was a very sad little group that gathered outside Mason's hut next morning. Martin's wife had been there all the morning cleaning up and doing what she could. One of the women had torn up her husband's only white shirt for a shroud, and they had made the little body look clean and even beautiful in the wretched little hut.

One after another the fossickers took off their hats and entered, stooping through the low door. Mason sat silently at the foot of the bunk with his head supported by his hand, and watched the men with a strange, abstracted air.

Bob had ransacked the camp in search of some boards for a coffin.

"It will be the last I'll be able to—why—do for him," he said.

At last he came to Mrs. Martin in despair. That lady took him into the dining-room, and pointed to a large pine table, of which she was very proud.

"Knock that table to pieces," she said.

Taking off the few things that were lyin
Bob turned it over and began to knock the

When he had finished the coffin one of

sicker's wives said it looked too bare, and she ripped up her black riding-skirt, and made Bob tack the cloth over the coffin.

There was only one vehicle available in the place, and that was Martin's old dray; so about two o'clock Pat Martin attached his old horse Dublin to the shafts with sundry bits of harness and plenty of old rope, and dragged Dublin, dray and all, across to Mason's hut.

The little coffin was carried out, and two gin-cases were placed by its side in the dray to serve as seats for Mrs. Martin and Mrs. Grimshaw, who mounted in tearful silence.

Pat Martin felt for his pipe, but remembered himself and mounted on the shaft. Mason fastened up the door of the hut with a padlock. A couple of blows on one of his sharp points roused Dublin from his reverie. With a lurch to the right and another to the left he started, and presently the little funeral disappeared down the road that led to the "town" and its cemetery.

About six months afterwards Bob Sawkins went on a short journey, and returned with a tall, bearded young man. He and Bob arrived after dark, and went straight to Mason's hut. There was a light inside, but when Bob knocked there was no answer.

"Go in; don't be afraid," he said to his companion.

The stranger pushed open the creaking door, and stood bareheaded just inside the doorway.

A billy was boiling unheeded on the fire. Mason sat at the table with his face buried in his arms.

"Father!"

There was no answer, but the flickering of the firelight made the stranger think he could detect an impatient shrug in Mason's shoulders.

For a moment the stranger paused irresolute, and then stepping up to the table he laid his hand on Mason's arm, and said gently:

"Father! Do you want another mate?"

But the sleeper did not—at least, not in this world.

THE DROVER'S WIFE

THE two-roomed house is built of round timber, slabs, and stringy bark, and floored with split slabs. A big bark kitchen standing at one end is larger than the house itself, verandah included.

Bush all round—bush with no horizon, for the country is flat. No ranges in the distance. The bush consists of stunted, rotten native apple trees. No undergrowth. Nothing to relieve the eye save the darker green of a few sheoaks which are sighing above the narrow, almost waterless creek. Nineteen miles to the nearest sign of civilisation—a shanty on the main road.

The drover, an ex-squatter, is away with sheep. His wife and children are left here alone.

Four ragged, dried-up-looking children are playing about the house. Suddenly one of them yells: "Snake! Mother, here's a snake!"

The gaunt, sun-browned bushwoman dashes from the kitchen, snatches her baby from the ground, holds it on her left hip, and reaches for a stick.

"Where is it?"

"Here! gone into the wood-heap!" yells the eldest boy—a sharp-faced, excited urchin of eleven.

"Stop there, mother! I'll have him. Stand back! I'll have the beggar!"

"Tommy, come here, or you'll be bit. Come here at once when I tell you, you little wretch!"

The youngster comes reluctantly, carrying a stick bigger than himself. Then he yells, triumphantly:

"There it goes—under the house!" and darts away with club uplifted. At the same time the big, black, yellow-eyed dog-of-all-breeds, who has shown the wildest interest in the proceedings, breaks his chain and rushes after that snake. He is a moment late, however, and his nose reaches the crack in the slabs just as the end of its tail disappears. Almost at the same moment the boy's club comes down and skins the aforesaid nose. Alligator takes small notice of this, and proceeds to undermine the building; but he is subdued after a struggle and chained up. They cannot afford to lose him.

The drover's wife makes the children stand together near the dog-house while she watches for the snake. She gets two small dishes of milk and sets them down near the wall to tempt it to come out; but an hour goes by and it does not show itself.

It is near sunset, and a thunderstorm is coming. The children must be brought inside. She will not take them into the house, for she knows the snake is there, and may at any moment come up through the cracks in the rough slab floor; so she carries

several armfuls of firewood into the kitchen, and then takes the children there. The kitchen has no floor — or, rather, an earthen one — called a "ground floor" in this part of the bush. There is a large, roughly made table in the centre of the place. She brings the children in, and makes them get on this table. They are two boys and two girls —mere babies. She gives them some supper, and then, before it gets dark, she goes into the house, and snatches up some pillows and bedclothes—expecting to see or lay her hand on the snake any minute. She makes a bed on the kitchen table for the children, and sits down beside it to watch all night.

She has an eye on the corner, and a green sapling club laid in readiness on the dresser by her side, together with her sewing basket and a copy of the *Young Ladies' Journal.* She has brought the dog into the room.

Tommy turns in, under protest, but says he'll lie awake all night and smash that blinded snake.

His mother asks him how many times she has told him not to swear.

He has his club with him under the bedclothes, and Jacky protests:

"Mummy! Tommy's skinnin' me alive wif his club. Make him take it out."

Tommy: "Shet up, you little ——! D'yer want to be bit with the snake?"

Jacky shuts up.

"If yer bit," says Tommy, after a pause, "you'll swell up, an' smell, an' turn red an' green an' blue all over till yer bust. Won't he, mother?"

"Now then, don't frighten the child. Go to sleep," she says.

The two younger children go to sleep, and now and then Jacky complains of being "skeezed." More room is made for him. Presently Tommy says: "Mother! listen to them (adjective) little 'possums. I'd like to screw their blanky necks."

And Jacky protests drowsily:

"But they don't hurt us, the little blanks!"

Mother: "There, I told you you'd teach Jacky to swear." But the remark makes her smile. Jacky goes to sleep.

Presently Tommy asks:

"Mother! Do you think they'll ever extricate the (adjective) kangaroo?"

"Lord! How am I to know, child? Go to sleep."

"Will you wake me if the snake comes out?"

"Yes. Go to sleep."

Near midnight. The children are all asleep and she sits there still, sewing and reading by turns. From time to time she glances round the floor and wall-plate, and whenever she hears a noise she reaches for the stick. The thunderstorm comes on, and the wind, rushing through the cracks in the slab wall, threatens to blow out her candle. She places it on a sheltered part of the dresser

and fixes up a newspaper to protect it. At every flash of lightning, the cracks between the slabs gleam like polished silver. The thunder rolls, and the rain comes down in torrents.

Alligator lies at full length on the floor, with his eyes turned towards the partition. She knows by this that the snake is there. There are large cracks in that wall opening under the floor of the dwelling-house.

She is not a coward, but recent events have shaken her nerves. A little son of her brother-in-law was lately bitten by a snake, and died. Besides, she has not heard from her husband for six months, and is anxious about him.

He was a drover, and started squatting here when they were married. The drought of 18— ruined him. He had to sacrifice the remnant of his flock and go droving again. He intends to move his family into the nearest town when he comes back, and, in the meantime, his brother, who keeps a shanty on the main road, comes over about once a month with provisions. The wife has still a couple of cows, one horse, and a few sheep. The brother-in-law kills one of the sheep occasionally, gives her what she needs of it, and takes the rest in return for other provisions.

She is used to being left alone. She once lived like this for eighteen months. As a girl she built the usual castles in the air; but all her girlish hopes and aspirations have long been dead. She finds all

the excitement and recreation she needs in the *Young Ladies' Journal*, and, Heaven help her! takes a pleasure in the fashion-plates.

Her husband is an Australian, and so is she. He is careless, but a good enough husband. If he had the means he would take her to the city and keep her there like a princess. They are used to being apart, or at least she is. "No use fretting," she says. He may forget sometimes that he is married; but if he has a good cheque when he comes back he will give most of it to her. When he had money he took her to the city several times—hired a railway sleeping compartment, and put up at the best hotels. He also bought her a buggy, but they had to sacrifice that along with the rest.

The last two children were born in the bush—one while her husband was bringing a drunken doctor, by force, to attend to her. She was alone on this occasion, and very weak. She had been ill with a fever. She prayed to God to send her assistance. God sent Black Mary—the "whitest" gin in all the land. Or, at least, God sent "King Jimmy" first, and he sent Black Mary. He put his black face round the door-post, took in the situation at a glance, and said cheerfully: "All right, Missis—I bring my old woman, she down alonga creek."

One of her children died while she was here alone. She rode nineteen miles for assistance, carrying the dead child.

. . . . . .

It must be near one or two o'clock. The fire is burning low. Alligator lies with his head resting on his paws, and watches the wall. He is not a very beautiful dog to look at, and the light shows numerous old wounds where the hair will not grow. He is afraid of nothing on the face of the earth or under it. He will tackle a bullock as readily as he will tackle a flea. He hates all other dogs—except kangaroo-dogs—and has a marked dislike to friends or relations of the family. They seldom call, however. He sometimes makes friends with strangers. He hates snakes and has killed many, but he will be bitten some day and die; most snake-dogs end that way.

Now and then the bushwoman lays down her work and watches, and listens, and thinks. She thinks of things in her own life, for there is little else to think about.

The rain will make the grass grow, and this reminds her how she fought a bush fire once while her husband was away. The grass was long, and very dry, and the fire threatened to burn her out. She put on an old pair of her husband's trousers and beat out the flames with a green bough, till great drops of sooty perspiration stood out on her forehead and ran in streaks down her blackened arms. The sight of his mother in trousers greatly amused Tommy, who worked like a little hero by her side, but the terrified baby howled lustily for his "mummy." The fire would have mastered her

but for four excited bushmen who arrived in the nick of time. It was a mixed-up affair all round; when she went to take up the baby he screamed and struggled convulsively, thinking it was a "black man"; and Alligator, trusting more to the child's sense than his own instinct, charged furiously, and (being old and slightly deaf) did not in his excitement at first recognise his mistress's voice, but continued to hang on to the moleskins until choked off by Tommy with a saddle-strap. The dog's sorrow for his blunder, and his anxiety to let it be known that it was all a mistake, was as evident as his ragged tail and a twelve-inch grin could make it. It was a glorious time for the boys; a day to look back to, and talk about, and laugh over for many years.

She thinks how she fought a flood during her husband's absence. She stood for hours in the drenching downpour, and dug an overflow gutter to save the dam across the creek. But she could not save it. There are things that a bushwoman cannot do. Next morning the dam was broken, and her heart was nearly broken too, for she thought how her husband would feel when he came home and saw the result of years of labour swept away. She cried then.

She also fought the *pleuro-pneumonia*—dosed and bled the few remaining cattle, and wept again when her two best cows died.

Again, she fought a mad bullock that besieged

the house for a day. She made bullets and fired at him through cracks in the slabs with an old shot-gun. He was dead in the morning. She skinned him and got seventeen-and-six for the hide.

She also fights the crows and eagles that have designs on her chickens. Her plan of campaign is very original. The children cry "Crows, mother!" and she rushes out and aims a broomstick at the birds as though it were a gun, and says, "Bung!" The crows leave in a hurry; they are cunning, but a woman's cunning is greater.

Occasionally a bushman in the horrors, or a villainous-looking sundowner, comes and nearly scares the life out of her. She generally tells the suspicious-looking stranger that her husband and two sons are at work below the dam, or over at the yard, for he always cunningly inquires for the boss.

Only last week a gallows-faced swagman—having satisfied himself that there were no men on the place—threw his swag down on the verandah, and demanded tucker. She gave him something to eat; then he expressed his intention of staying for the night. It was sundown then. She got a batten from the sofa, loosened the dog, and confronted the stranger, holding the batten in one hand and the dog's collar with the other. "Now you go!" she said. He looked at her and at the dog, said "All right, mum," in a cringing tone, and left. She was a determined-looking woman, and Alligator's yellow eyes glared unpleasantly—besides, the dog's

chawing-up apparatus greatly resembled that of the reptile he was named after.

She has few pleasures to think of as she sits here alone by the fire, on guard against a snake. All days are much the same to her; but on Sunday afternoon she dresses herself, tidies the children, smartens up baby, and goes for a lonely walk along the bush-track, pushing an old perambulator in front of her. She does this every Sunday. She takes as much care to make herself and the children look smart as she would if she were going to do the block in the city. There is nothing to see, however, and not a soul to meet. You might walk for twenty miles along this track without being able to fix a point in your mind, unless you are a bushman. This is because of the everlasting, maddening sameness of the stunted trees—that monotony which makes a man long to break away and travel as far as trains can go, and sail as far as ships can sail—and further.

But this bushwoman is used to the loneliness of it. As a girl-wife she hated it, but now she would feel strange away from it.

She is glad when her husband returns, but she does not gush or make a fuss about it. She gets him something good to eat, and tidies up the children.

She seems contented with her lot. She loves her children, but has no time to show it. She seems harsh to them. Her surroundings are not favour-

able to the development of the "womanly" or sentimental side of nature.

. . . . . .

It must be near morning now; but the clock is in the dwelling-house. Her candle is nearly done; she forgot that she was out of candles. Some more wood must be got to keep the fire up, and so she shuts the dog inside and hurries round to the wood-heap. The rain has cleared off. She seizes a stick, pulls it out, and—crash! the whole pile collapses.

Yesterday she bargained with a stray blackfellow to bring her some wood, and while he was at work she went in search of a missing cow. She was absent an hour or so, and the native black made good use of his time. On her return she was so astonished to see a good heap of wood by the chimney, that she gave him an extra fig of tobacco, and praised him for not being lazy. He thanked her, and left with head erect and chest well out. He was the last of his tribe and a King; but he had built that wood-heap hollow.

She is hurt now, and tears spring to her eyes as she sits down again by the table. She takes up a handkerchief to wipe the tears away, but pokes her eyes with her bare fingers instead. The handkerchief is full of holes, and she finds that she has put her thumb through one, and her forefinger through another.

This makes her laugh, to the surprise of the dog. She has a keen, very keen, sense of the ridiculous;

and some time or other she will amuse bushmen with the story.

She has been amused before like that. One day she sat down "to have a good cry," as she said—and the old cat rubbed against her dress and "cried too." Then she had to laugh.

. . . . . .

It must be near daylight. The room is very close and hot because of the fire. Alligator still watches the wall from time to time. Suddenly he becomes greatly interested; he draws himself a few inches nearer the partition, and a thrill runs through his body. The hair on the back of his neck begins to bristle, and the battle-light is in his yellow eyes. She knows what this means, and lays her hand on the stick. The lower end of one of the partition slabs has a large crack on both sides. An evil pair of small, bright, bead-like eyes glisten at one of these holes. The snake—a black one—comes slowly out, about a foot, and moves its head up and down. The dog lies still, and the woman sits as one fascinated. The snake comes out a foot further. She lifts her stick, and the reptile, as though suddenly aware of danger, sticks his head in through the crack on the other side of the slab, and hurries to get his tail round after him. Alligator springs, and his jaws come together with a snap. He misses, for his nose is large and the snake's body close down in the angle formed by the slabs and the floor. He snaps again as

the tail comes round. He has the snake now, and tugs it out eighteen inches. Thud, thud comes the woman's club on the ground. Alligator pulls again. Thud, thud. Alligator gives another pull and he has the snake out—a black brute, five feet long. The head rises to dart about, but the dog has the enemy close to the neck. He is a big, heavy dog, but quick as a terrier. He shakes the snake as though he felt the original curse in common with mankind. The eldest boy wakes up, seizes his stick, and tries to get out of bed, but his mother forces him back with a grip of iron. Thud, thud—the snake's back is broken in several places. Thud, thud—its head is crushed, and Alligator's nose skinned again.

She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick, carries it to the fire, and throws it in; then piles on the wood, and watches the snake burn. The boy and dog watch, too. She lays her hand on the dog's head, and all the fierce, angry light dies out of his yellow eyes. The younger children are quieted, and presently go to sleep. The dirty-legged boy stands for a moment in his shirt, watching the fire. Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and, throwing his arms round her neck, exclaims:

"Mother, I won't never go drovin'; blast me if I do!"

And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush.

THE BUSH UNDERTAKER

"FIVE BOB!"

The old man shaded his eyes and peered through the dazzling glow of that broiling Christmas Day. He stood just within the door of a slab-and-bark hut situated upon the bank of a barren creek; sheep-yards lay to the right, and a low line of bare brown ridges formed a suitable background to the scene.

"Five Bob!" shouted he again; and a dusty sheep-dog rose wearily from the shaded side of the hut and looked inquiringly at his master, who pointed towards some sheep which were straggling from the flock.

"Fetch 'em back," he said confidently.

The dog went off, and his master returned to the interior of the hut.

"We'll yard 'em early," he said to himself; "the super won't know. We'll yard 'em early, and have the arternoon to ourselves."

"We'll get dinner," he added, glancing at some pots on the fire, "I cud do a bit of doughboy, an' that theer boggabri 'll eat like tater-marrer along of the salt meat." He moved one of the black buckets from the blaze. "I likes to keep it jist on the

sizzle," he said in explanation to himself; "hard bilin' makes it tough—I'll keep it jist a-simmerin'."

Here his soliloquy was interrupted by the return of the dog.

"All right, Five Bob," said the hatter, "dinner 'll be ready dreckly. Jist keep yer eye on the sheep till I calls yer; keep 'em well rounded up, an' we'll yard 'em afterwards and have a holiday."

This speech was accompanied by a gesture evidently intelligible, for the dog retired as though he understood English, and the cooking proceeded.

"I'll take a pick an' shovel with me an' root up that old blackfellow," mused the shepherd, evidently following up a recent train of thought; "I reckon it'll do now. I'll put in the spuds."

The last sentence referred to the cooking, the first to a blackfellow's grave about which he was curious.

"The sheep's a-campin'," said the soliloquiser, glancing through the door. "So me an' Five Bob 'll be able to get our dinner in peace. I wish I had just enough fat to make the pan siss; I'd treat myself to a leather-jacket; but it took three weeks' skimmin' to get enough for them theer dough-boys."

In due time the dinner was dished up; and the old man seated himself on a block, with the lid of a gin-case across his knees for a table. Five Bob squatted opposite with the liveliest interest and appreciation depicted on his intelligent countenance.

Dinner proceeded very quietly, except when the carver paused to ask the dog how some tasty morsel went with him, and Five Bob's tail declared that it went very well indeed.

"Here y'are, try this," cried the old man, tossing him a large piece of doughboy. A click of Five Bob's jaws and the dough was gone.

"Clean into his liver!" said the old man with a faint smile.

He washed up the tinware in the water the duff had been boiled in, and then, with the assistance of the dog, yarded the sheep.

This accomplished, he took a pick and shovel and an old sack, and started out over the ridge, followed, of course, by his four-legged mate. After tramping some three miles he reached a spur, running out from the main ridge. At the extreme end of this, under some gum trees, was a little mound of earth, barely defined in the grass, and indented in the centre as all blackfellows' graves were.

He set to work to dig it up, and sure enough, in about half-an-hour he bottomed on payable dirt.

When he had raked up all the bones, he amused himself by putting them together on the grass and by speculating as to whether they had belonged to black or white, male or female. Failing, however, to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion, he dusted them with great care, put them in the bag, and started for home.

He took a short cut this time over the ridge and

down a gully which was full of ring-barked trees and long white grass. He had nearly reached its mouth when a great greasy black iguana clambered up a sapling from under his feet and looked fightable.

"Dang the jumpt-up thing!" cried the old man. "It gin me a start!"

At the foot of the sapling he espied an object which he at first thought was the blackened carcass of a sheep, but on closer examination discovered to be the body of a man; it lay with its forehead resting on its hands, dried to a mummy by the intense heat of the western summer.

"Me luck's in for the day and no mistake!" said the shepherd, scratching the back of his head, while he took stock of the remains. He picked up a stick and tapped the body on the shoulder; the flesh sounded like leather. He turned it over on its side; it fell flat on its back like a board, and the shrivelled eyes seemed to peer up at him from under the blackened wrists.

He stepped back involuntarily, but, recovering himself, leant on his stick and took in all the ghastly details.

There was nothing in the blackened features to tell aught of name or race, but the dress proclaimed the remains to be those of a European. The old man caught sight of a black bottle in the grass, close beside the corpse. This set him thinking. Presently he knelt down and examined the soles of

the dead man's Blucher boots, and then, rising with an air of conviction, exclaimed: "Brummy! by gosh!—busted up at last!"

"I tole yer so, Brummy," he said impressively, addressing the corpse, "I allers told yer as how it 'ud be—an' here y'are, you thundering jumpt-up cuss-o'-God fool. Yer cud earn mor'n any man in the colony, but yer'd lush it all away. I allers sed as how it 'ud end, an' now yer kin see fur y'self."

"I spect yer was a-comin' t' me t' get fixt up an' set straight agin; then yer was agoin' to swear off, same as yer allers did; an' here y'are, an' now I expect I'll have t' fix yer up for the last time an' make yer decent, for 'twon't do t' leave yer a-lyin' out here like a dead sheep."

He picked up the corked bottle and examined it. To his great surprise it was nearly full of rum.

"Well, this gits me," exclaimed the old man; "me luck's in, this Christmas, an' no mistake. He must a' got the jams early in his spree, or he wouldn't be a-making for me with near a bottleful left. Howsomenever, here goes."

Looking round, his eyes lit up with satisfaction as he saw some waste bits of bark which had been left by a party of strippers who had been getting bark there for the stations. He picked up two pieces, one about four and the other six feet long, and each about two feet wide, and brought them over to the body. He laid the longest strip by the side of the corpse, which he proceeded to lift on to it.

"Come on, Brummy," he said, in a softer tone than usual, "yer ain't as bad as yer might be, considerin' as it must be three good months since yer slipped yer wind. I spect it was the rum as preserved yer. It was the death of yer when yer was alive, an' now yer dead, it preserves yer like—like a mummy."

Then he placed the other strip on top, with the hollow side downwards—thus sandwiching the defunct between the two pieces—removed the saddle strap, which he wore for a belt, and buckled it round one end, while he tried to think of something with which to tie up the other.

"I can't take any more strips off my shirt," he said, critically examining the skirts of the old blue overshirt he wore. "I might get a strip or two more off, but it's short enough already. Let's see; how long have I been awearin' of that shirt? Oh, I remember, I bought it jist two days afore Five Bob was pupped. I can't afford a new shirt jist yet; howsomenever, seein' it's Brummy, I'll jist borrow a couple more strips and sew 'em on agen when I git home."

He up-ended Brummy, and placing his shoulder against the middle of the lower sheet of bark, lifted the corpse to a horizontal position; then taking the bag of bones in his hand, he started for home.

"I ain't a-spendin' sech a dull Christmas arter all," he reflected, as he plodded on; but he had not walked above a hundred yards when he saw a black

iguana sidling into the grass by the side of the path.

"That's another of them theer dang things!" he exclaimed. "That's two I've seed this mornin'."

Presently he remarked: "Yer don't smell none too sweet, Brummy. It must 'a' been jist about the middle of shearin' when yer pegged out. I wonder who got yer last cheque? Shoo! theer's another black gohanner—theer must be a flock on 'em."

He rested Brummy on the ground while he had another pull at the bottle, and, before going on, packed the bag of bones on his shoulder under the body, but he soon stopped again.

"The thunderin' jumpt-up bones is all skew-whift," he said. "'Ole on, Brummy, an' I'll fix 'em;" and he leaned the dead man against a tree while he settled the bones on his shoulder, and took another pull at the bottle.

About a mile further on he heard a rustling in the grass to the right, and, looking round, saw another iguana gliding off sideways, with its long snaky neck turned towards him.

This puzzled the shepherd considerably, the strangest part of it being that Five Bob wouldn't touch the reptile, but slunk off with his tail down when ordered to "sick 'em."

"Theer's sothin' comic about them theer gohanners," said the old man at last. "I've seed swarms of grasshoppers an' big mobs of kangaroos, but

dang me if ever I seed a flock of black gohanners afore!"

On reaching the hut the old man dumped the corpse against the wall, wrong end up, and stood scratching his head while he endeavoured to collect his muddled thoughts; but he had not placed Brummy at the correct angle, and, consequently, that individual fell forward and struck him a violent blow on the shoulder with the iron toes of his Blucher boots.

The shock sobered him. He sprang a good yard, instinctively hitching up his moleskins in preparation for flight; but a backward glance revealed to him the true cause of this supposed attack from the rear. Then he lifted the body, stood it on its feet against the chimney, and ruminated as to where he should lodge his mate for the night, not noticing that the shorter sheet of bark had slipped down on the boots and left the face exposed.

"I spect I'll have ter put yer into the chimney trough for the night, Brummy," said he, turning round to confront the corpse. "Yer can't expect me to take yer into the hut, though I did it when yer was in a worse state than—— Lord!"

The shepherd was not prepared for the awful scrutiny that gleamed on him from those empty sockets; his nerves received a shock, and it was some time before he recovered himself sufficiently to speak.

"Now look a-here, Brummy," said he, shaking

his finger severely at the delinquent, "I don't want to pick a row with yer; I'd do as much for yer an' more than any other man, an' well yer knows it; but if yer starts playin' any of yer jumpt-up pranktical jokes on me, and a scarin' of me after a-humpin' of yer 'ome, by the 'oly frost I'll kick yer to jim-rags, so I will."

This admonition delivered, he hoisted Brummy into the chimney trough, and with a last glance towards the sheep-yards, he retired to his bunk to have, as he said, a snooze.

He had more than a "snooze," however, for when he woke it was dark, and the bushman's instinct told him it must be nearly nine o'clock.

He lit a slush lamp and poured the remainder of the rum into a pannikin; but, just as he was about to lift the draught to his lips, he heard a peculiar rustling sound overhead, and put the pot down on the table with a slam that spilled some of the precious liquor.

Five Bob whimpered, and the old shepherd, though used to the weird and dismal, as one living alone in the bush must necessarily be, felt the icy breath of fear at his heart.

He reached hastily for his old shot-gun, and went out to investigate. He walked round the hut several times and examined the roof on all sides, but saw nothing. Brummy appeared to be in the same position.

At last, persuading himself that the noise was

caused by 'possums or the wind, the old man went inside, boiled his billy, and after composing his nerves somewhat with a light supper and a meditative smoke, retired for the night. He was aroused several times before midnight by the same mysterious sound overhead, but, though he rose and examined the roof on each occasion by the light of the rising moon, he discovered nothing.

At last he determined to sit up and watch until daybreak, and for this purpose took up a position on a log a short distance from the hut, with his gun laid in readiness across his knee.

After watching for about an hour, he saw a black object coming over the ridge-pole. He grabbed his gun and fired. The thing disappeared. He ran round to the other side of the hut, and there was a great black iguana in violent convulsions on the ground.

Then the old man saw it all. "The thunderin' jumpt-up thing has been a-havin' o' me," he exclaimed. "The same cuss-o'-God wretch has a-follered me 'ome, an' has been a-havin' its Christmas dinner off of Brummy, an' a-hauntin' o' me into the bargain, the jumpt-up tinker!"

As there was no one by whom he could send a message to the station, and the old man dared not leave the sheep and go himself, he determined to bury the body the next afternoon, reflecting that the authorities could disinter it for inquest if they pleased.

So he brought the sheep home early, and made

arrangements for the burial by measuring the outer casing of Brummy and digging a hole according to those dimensions.

"That 'minds me," he said, "I never rightly knowed Brummy's religion, blest if ever I did. Howsomenever, there's one thing sartin—none o' them theer pianer-fingered parsons is a-goin' ter take the trouble ter travel out inter this God-forgotten part to hold sarvice over him, seein' as how his last cheque's blued. But as I've got the fun'ral arrangements all in me own hands, I'll do jestice to it, and see that Brummy has a good comfortable buryin'—and more's unpossible."

"It's time yer turned in, Brum," he said, lifting the body down.

He carried it to the grave and dropped it into one corner like a post. He arranged the bark so as to cover the face, and, by means of a piece of clothes-line, lowered the body to a horizontal position. Then he threw in an armful of gum leaves, and then, very reluctantly, took the shovel and dropped in a few shovelfuls of earth.

"An' this is the last of Brummy," he said, leaning on his spade and looking away over the tops of the ragged gums on the distant range.

This reflection seemed to engender a flood of memories, in which the old man became absorbed. He leaned heavily upon his spade and thought.

"Arter all," he murmured sadly, "arter all—it were Brummy."

"Brummy," he said at last, "it's all over now; nothin' matters now—nothin' didn't ever matter, nor—nor don't. You uster say as how it 'ud be all right termorrer" (pause); "termorrer's come, Brummy—come fur you—it ain't come fur me yet, but—it's a-comin'."

He threw in some more earth.

"Yer don't remember, Brummy, an' mebbe yer don't want to remember—*I* don't want to remember—but—well, but, yer see that's where yer got the pull on me."

He shovelled in some more earth and paused again.

The dog rose, with ears erect, and looked anxiously first at his master, and then into the grave.

"Theer oughter be somethin' sed," muttered the old man; "'tain't right to put 'im under like a dog. There oughter to be some sort o' sarmin." He sighed heavily in the listening silence that followed this remark, and proceeded with his work. He filled the grave to the brim this time, and fashioned the mound carefully with his spade. Once or twice he muttered the words, "I am the rassaraction." As he laid the tools quietly aside, and stood at the head of the grave, he was evidently trying to remember the something that ought to be said. He removed his hat, placed it carefully on the grass, held his hands out from his sides and a little to the front, drew a long deep breath, and said with a solemnity that greatly disturbed Five

Bob, "Hashes ter hashes, dus ter dus, Brummy, —an'—an' in hopes of a great an' gerlorious rassaraction!"

He sat down on a log near by, rested his elbows on his knees and passed his hand wearily over his forehead—but only as one who was tired and felt the heat; and presently he rose, took up the tools, and walked back to the hut.

And the sun sank again on the grand Australian bush—the nurse and tutor of eccentric minds, the home of the weird, and of much that is different from things in other lands.

COMING ACROSS—A STUDY IN THE STEERAGE

WE were delayed for an hour or so inside Sydney Heads, taking passengers from the *Oroya*, which had just arrived from England and anchored off Watson's Bay. An Adelaide boat went alongside the ocean liner, while we dropped anchor at a respectable distance. This puzzled some of us until one of the passengers stopped an ancient mariner and inquired. The sailor jerked his thumb upwards, and left. The passengers stared aloft till some of them got the lockjaw in the back of their necks, and then another sailor suggested that we had yards to our masts, while the Adelaide boat had not.

It seemed a pity that the new chums for New Zealand didn't have a chance to see Sydney after coming so far and getting so near. It struck them that way too. They saw Melbourne, which seemed another injustice to the old city. However, nothing matters much nowadays, and they might see Sydney in happier times.

They looked like new chums, especially the "furst clarsters," and there were two or three Scotsmen

among them who looked like Scots, and talked like it too; also an Irishman. Great Britain and Ireland do not seem to be learning anything fresh about Australia. We had a yarn with one of these new arrivals, and got talking about the banks. It turned out that he was a Radical. He spat over the side and said:

"It's a something shame the way things is carried on! Now, look here, a banker can rob hundreds of wimmin and children an' widders and orfuns, and nothin' is done to him; but if a poor man only embezzles a shilling *he gets transported to the colonies for life!*" The italics are ours, but the words were his.

We explained to this new chum that transportation was done away with long ago, as far as Australia was concerned, that no more convicts were sent out here—only men who ought to be; and he seemed surprised. He did not call us a liar, but he looked as if he thought that we were prevaricating. We were glad that he didn't say so, for he was a bigger man. New chums are generally more robust than Australians.

When we got through the Heads some one pointed to the wrong part of the cliff and said:

"That's where the *Dunbar* was wrecked."

Shortly afterwards another man pointed to another wrong part of the cliffs, and observed incidentally:

"That's where the *Dunbar* was wrecked."

Pretty soon a third man came along and pointed

to a third wrong part of the cliff, and remarked casually:

"That's where the *Dunbar* was wrecked."

We moved aft and met the fourth mate, who jerked his thumb over his shoulder at the cliffs in general, and muttered condescendingly:

"That's where the *Dunbar* was wrecked."

It was not long before a woman turned round and asked:

"Was that the place where the *Dunbar* was wrecked, please?"

We said "Yes," and she said "Lor," and beckoned to a friend.

We went for'ard and met an old sailor, who glared at us, jerked his thumb at the coast and growled:

"That's where the *Dunbar* went down."

Then we went below; but we felt a slight relief when he said "went down" instead of "was wrecked."

It is doubtful whether a passenger boat ever cleared Sydney Heads since the wild night of that famous wreck without some one pointing to the wrong part of the cliffs, and remarking:

"That's where the *Dunbar* was wrecked."

The *Dunbar* fiend is inseparable from Australian coasting steamers.

We travelled second-class in the interests of journalism. You get more points for copy in the

steerage. It was a sacrifice; but we hope to profit by it some day.

There were about fifty male passengers, including half-a-dozen New Zealand shearers, two of whom came on board drunk—their remarks for the first night mainly consisted of "gory." "Gory" is part of the Australian language now—a big part.

The others were chiefly tradesmen, labourers, clerks, and hard-up bagmen, driven out of Australia by the hard times there, and glad, no doubt, to get away. There was a jeweller on board, of course, and his name was Moses or Cohen. If it wasn't it should have been—or Isaacs. His Christian name was probably Benjamin. We called him Jacobs. He passed away most of his time on board in swopping watch lies with the other passengers and good-naturedly spoiling their Waterburys.

One commercial traveller shipped with a flower in his button-hole. His girl gave it to him on the wharf, and told him to keep it till it faded, and then press it. She was a barmaid. She thought he was "going saloon," but he came forward as soon as the wharf was out of sight. He gave the flower to the stewardess, and told us about these things one moonlight night during the voyage.

There was another—a well-known Sydney man—whose friends thought that he was going saloon, and turned up in good force to see him off. He

spent his last shilling "shouting," and kept up his end of the pathetic little farce out of consideration for the feelings of certain proud female relatives, and not because he was "proud"—at least in that way. He stood on a conspicuous part of the saloon deck and waved his white handkerchief until Miller's Point came between. Then he came forward where he belonged. But he was proud—bitterly so. He had a flower too, but he did not give it to the stewardess. He had it pressed, we think (for we knew him), and perhaps he wears it now over the place where his heart used to be.

When Australia was fading from view we shed a tear, which was all we had to shed; at least, we tried to shed a tear, and could not. It is best to be exact when you are writing from experience.

Just as Australia was fading from view, some one looked through a glass, and said in a sad, tired kind of voice that he could just see the place where the *Dunbar* was wrecked.

Several passengers were leaning about and saying "Europe! E-u-rope!" in agonised tones. None of them were going to Europe, and the new chums said nothing about it. This reminds us that some people say "Asia! Asia! Ak-kak-Asia!" when somebody spills the pepper. There was a pepper-box without a stopper on the table in our cabin. The fact soon attracted attention.

The new chum came along and asked us whether the Maoris were very bad round Sydney. He'd

heard that they were. We told him that we had never had any trouble with them to speak of, and gave him another show.

"Did you ever hear of the wreck of the *Dunbar?*" we asked.

He said that he never "heerd tell" of it, but he had "heerd" of the wreck of the *Victoria.*

We gave him best.

The first evening passed off quietly, except for the vinously-excited shearers. They had sworn eternal friendship with a convivial dude from the saloon, and he made a fine specimen fool of himself for an hour or so. He never showed his nose for'ard again.

Now and then a passenger would solemnly seek the steward and have a beer. The steward drew it out of a small keg which lay on its side on a shelf with a wooden tap sticking out of the end of it—out of the end of the keg, we mean. The beer tasted like warm but weak vinegar, and cost sixpence per small glass. The bagman told the steward that he could not compliment him on the quality of his liquor, but the steward said nothing. He did not even seem interested—only bored. He had heard the same remark often before, no doubt. He was a fat, solemn steward—not formal, but very reticent—unresponsive. He looked like a man who had conducted a religious Conservative paper once and failed, and had then gone into the wholesale produce line, and failed again, and finally got his

present billet through the influence of his creditors and two clergymen. He might have been a sociable fellow, a man about town, even a gay young dog, and a Radical writer before he was driven to accept the editorship of the aforesaid periodical. He probably came of a "good English family." He was now, very likely, either a rigid Presbyterian or an extreme freethinker. He thought a lot, anyway, and looked as if he knew a lot too—too much for words, in fact.

We took a turn on deck before turning in, and heard two men arguing about the way in which the *Dunbar* was wrecked.

The commercial travellers, the jeweller, and one or two new chums who were well provided with clothing undressed deliberately and retired ostentatiously in pyjamas; but there were others—men of better days—who turned in either very early or very late, when the cabin was quiet, and slipped hurriedly and furtively out of their clothes and between the blankets, as if they were ashamed of the poverty of their underwear.

It is well that the Lord can see deep down into the hearts of men, for He has to judge them; it is well that the majority of mankind cannot, because, if they could, the world would be altogether too sorrowful to live in; and we do not think the angels can either, else they would not be happy—if they could and were they would not be angels any longer—they would be devils. Study it out on a slate.

We turned in feeling comfortably dismal, and almost wishing that we had gone down with the *Dunbar*.

The intoxicated shearers and the dude kept their concert up till a late hour that night—or, rather, a very early hour next morning; and at about midnight they were reinforced by the commercial traveller and Moses, the jeweller, who had been visiting acquaintances aft. This push was encouraged by voices from various bunks, and enthusiastically barracked for by a sandy-complexioned, red-headed comedian with twinkling grey eyes, who occupied the berth immediately above our own.

They stood with their backs to the bunks, and their feet braced against the deck, or lurched round, and took friendly pulls from whisky flasks, and chyacked each other, and laughed, and blowed, and lied like—like Australian bushmen; and occasionally they broke out into snatches of song—and as often broke down. Few Englishmen know more than the first verse, or two lines, of even their most popular song, and, when elevated enough to think they can sing, they repeat the first verse over and over again, with the wrong words, and with a sort of "Ta-ra-ra-rum-ti-tooral, Ta-ra-ra-ra-rum-ti, ta-ra-ra-rum-tum-ti-rum-rum-tum-ti-dee-e-e," by way of variation.

Presently—suddenly, it seemed to our drowsy senses—two of the shearers and the bagman com-

menced arguing with drunken gravity and precision about politics, even while a third bushman was approaching the climax of an out-back yarn of many adjectives, of which he himself was the hero. The scraps of conversation that we caught were somewhat as follow. We leave out most of the adjectives.

First Voice: "Now, look here. The women will vote for men, not principles. That's why I'm against women voting. Now, just mark my——"

Third Voice (*trying to finish yarn*): "Hold on. Just wait till I tell yer. Well, this bloomin' bloke, he says——"

Second Voice (*evidently in reply to first*): "*Principles* you mean, not men. You're getting a bit mixed, old man." (Smothered chuckle from comedian over our head.)

Third Voice (*seeming to drift round in search of sympathy*): "'You will?' sez I. 'Yes, I will,' he sez. 'Oh, you will, will yer?' I sez; and with that I——"

Second Voice (*apparently wandering from both subjects*): "Blanker has always stuck up for the workin' man, an' he'll get in, you'll see. Why, he's a bloomin' workin' man himself. Me and Blanker——"

Disgusted voice from a bunk: "Oh, that's damn rot! We've had enough of lumpers in Parliament: Horny hands are all right enough, but we don't want any more blanky horny heads!"

Third Voice (*threateningly*): "Who's talkin' about

'orny heads? That pitch is meant for us, ain't it? Do you mean to say that I've got a 'orny head?"

Here two men commenced snarling at each other, and there was some talk of punching the causes of the dispute; but the bagman interfered, a fresh flask was passed round, and some more eternal friendship sworn to.

We dozed off again, and the next time we were aware of anything the commercial and Moses had disappeared, the rest were lying or sitting in their bunks, and the third shearer was telling a yarn about an alleged fight he had at a shed up country; and perhaps he was telling it for the benefit of the dissatisfied individual who made the injudicious remark concerning horny heads.

"So I said to the boss-over-the-board, 'You're a nice sort of a thing,' I sez. 'Who are you talkin' to?' he says. 'You, bless yer,' I says. 'Now, look here,' he says, 'you get your cheque and clear!' 'All right,' I says, 'you can take that!' and I hauled off and landed him a beauty under the butt of the listener. Then the boss came along with two blacklegs, but the boys made a ring, and I laid out the blanks in just five minutes. Then I sez to the boss, 'That's the sort of cove I am,' I sez, 'an' now, if you——'"

But just here there came a deep, growling voice—seemingly from out of the depths of the forehold—anyway, there came a voice, and it said:

"For the Lord's sake give her a rest!"

The steward turned off the electricity, but there were two lanterns dimly burning in our part of the steerage. It was a narrow compartment running across the width of the boat, and had evidently been partitioned off from the top floor of the hold to meet the emigration from Australia to New Zealand. There were three tiers of bunks, two deep, on the far side, three rows of single bunks on the other, and two at each end of the cabin, the top ones just under the portholes.

The shearers had turned in "all standing"; two of them were lying feet to feet in a couple of outside lower berths. One lay on his stomach with his face turned outwards, his arm thrown over the side of the bunk, and his knuckles resting on the deck, the other lay on the broad of his back with his arm also hanging over the side and his knuckles resting on the floor. And so they slept the sleep of the drunk.

A fair, girl-faced young Swiss emigrant occupied one of the top berths, with his curly, flaxen head resting close alongside one of the lanterns that were dimly burning, and an Anglo-foreign dictionary in his hand. His mate, or brother, who resembled him in everything except that he had dark hair, lay asleep alongside; and in the next berth a long consumptive-looking new chum sat in his pyjamas, with his legs hanging over the edge, and his hands grasping the sideboard, to which, on his right hand, a sort of tin-can arrangement was hooked. He was

staring intently at nothing, and seemed to be thinking very hard.

We dozed off again, and woke suddenly to find our eyes wide open, and the young Swiss still studying, and the Jackaroo still sitting in the same position, but with a kind of waiting expression on his face—a sort of expectant light in his eyes. Suddenly he lurched for the can, and after a while he lay back looking like a corpse.

We slept again, and finally awoke to daylight and the clatter of plates. All the bunks were vacated except two, which contained corpses, apparently.

Wet decks, and a round, stiff, morning breeze, blowing strongly across the deck, abeam, and gustily through the open portholes. There was a dull grey sky, and the sea at first sight seemed to be of a dark blue or green, but on closer inspection it took a dirty slate colour, with splashes as of indigo in the hollows. There was one of those near, yet far-away horizons.

About two-thirds of the men were on deck, but the women had not shown up yet—nor did they show up until towards the end of the trip.

Some of the men were smoking in a sheltered corner, some walking up and down, two or three trying to play quoits, one looking at the poultry, one standing abaft the purser's cabin with hands in the pockets of his long ragged overcoat, watching the engines, and two more—carpenters—were

discussing a big cedar log, about five feet in diameter, which was lashed on deck alongside the hatch.

While we were waiting for the *Oroya* some of the ship's officers came and had a consultation over this log and called up part of the crew, who got some more ropes and a chain onto it. It struck us at the time that that log would make a sensation if it fetched loose in rough weather. But there wasn't any rough weather.

The fore-cabin was kept clean; the assistant steward was good-humoured and obliging; his chief was civil enough to freeze the Never-Never country; but the bill of fare was monotonous.

During the afternoon a first-salooner made himself obnoxious by swelling round for'ard. He was a big, bull-necked "Britisher" (that word covers it) with a bloated face, prominent gooseberry eyes, fore 'n' aft cap, and long tan shoes. He seemed as if he'd come to see a "Zoo," and was dissatisfied with it—had a fine contempt for it, in fact, because it did not come up to other zoological gardens that he had seen in London, and on the *aw*-continong and in the-*aw*-er-*aw*—the States, dontcherknow. The fellows reckoned that he ought to be "took down a peg" (dontcherknow) and the sandy-complexioned comedian said he'd do it. So he stepped softly up to the swell, tapped him lightly on the shoulder, and pointed aft—holding his arm out like a pump handle and his forefinger rigid.

The Britisher's face was a study; it was blank at first and then it went all colours, and wore, in succession, every possible expression except a pleasant one. He seemed bursting with indignation, but he did not speak—could not, perhaps; and, as soon as he could detach his feet from the spot to which they had been nailed in the first place by astonishment, he stalked aft. He did not come to see the zoo any more.

The fellows in the fore-cabin that evening were growling about the bad quality of the "grub" supplied.

The Sydney man said that the roast beef looked and tasted like something scraped off the inside of a hide; and that the potatoes had apparently been plucked before they were ripe, for they were mostly green inside. He evidently meant the last remark for a joke.

Then the shearer's volcano showed signs of activity. He shifted round, spat impatiently, and said:

"You chaps don't know what yer talkin' about. You want something to grumble about. You should have been out with me last year on the Paroo in Noo South Wales. The meat we got there was so bad that it uster travel!"

"What?"

"Yes! travel! take the track! go on the wallaby! The cockies over there used to hang the meat up to the branches of the trees, and just shake it whenever they wanted to feed the fowls. And the water

was so bad that half a pound of tea in the billy wouldn't make no impression on the colour—nor the taste. The further west we went the worse our meat got, till at last we had to carry a dog-chain to chain it up at night. Then it got worse and broke the chain, and then we had to train the blessed dogs to shepherd it and bring it back. But we fell in with another chap with a bad old dog—a downright knowing, thieving, old hard-case of a dog; and this dog led our dogs astray—demoralised them—corrupted their morals—and so one morning they came home with the blooming meat inside of them, instead of outside—and we had to go hungry for breakfast."

"You'd better turn in, gentlemen. I'm going to turn off the electric light," said the steward.

The yarn reminded the Sydney man of a dog he had, and he started some dog lies.

"This dog of mine," he said, "knowed the way into the best public-houses. If I came to a strange town and wanted a good drink, I'd only have to say, 'Jack, I'm dry,' and he'd lead me all right. He always knew the side entrances and private doors after hours, and I——"

But the yarn did not go very well—it fell flat, in fact. Then the commercial traveller was taken bad with an anecdote.

"That's nothing," he said. "I had a black bag once that knew the way into public-houses."

"A what?"

"Yes; a black bag. A long black bag like that one I've got there in my bunk. I was staying at a boarding-house in Sydney, and one of us used to go out every night for a couple of bottles of beer, and we carried the bottles in the bag; and when we got opposite the pub the front end of the bag would begin to swing round towards the door. It was wonderful. It was just as if there was a lump of steel in the end of the bag and a magnet in the bar. We tried it with ever so many people, but it always acted the same. We couldn't use that bag for any other purpose, for if we carried it along the street it would make our wrists ache trying to go into pubs. It twisted my wrist one time, and it ain't got right since—I always feel the pain in dull weather. Well, one night we got yarning and didn't notice how the time was going, and forgot to go for the beer till it was nearly too late. We looked for the bag and couldn't find it—we generally kept it under a side-table, but it wasn't there, and before we were done looking, eleven o'clock went. We sat down round the fire, feeling pretty thirsty, and were just thinking about turning in when we heard a thump on the table behind us. We looked round, and there was that bag with two full bottles of English ale in it. Then I remembered that I'd left a bob in the bottom of the bag, and——"

The steward turned off the electric light.

There were some hundreds of cases of oranges

stacked on deck, and made fast with matting and cordage to the bulwarks. That night was very dark, and next morning there was a row. The captain said he'd "give any man three months that he caught at those oranges."

"Wot are yer givin' us?" said a shearer. "We don't know anything about yer bloomin' oranges. . . . I seen one of the saloon passengers moochin' round for'ard last night. You'd better search the saloon for your blasted oranges, an' don't come round tacklin' the wrong men."

It was not necessary to search our quarters, for the "off-side" steward was sweeping orange peel out of the steerage for three days thereafter.

And that night, just as we were about to fall asleep, a round, good-humoured face loomed over the edge of the shelf above and a small, twinkling, grey eye winked at us. Then a hand came over, gave a jerk, and something fell on our nose. It was an orange. We sent a "thank you" up through the boards, and commenced hurriedly and furtively to stow away the orange. But the comedian had an axe to grind—most people have—wanted to drop his peel alongside our berth; and it made us uneasy, because we did not want such circumstantial evidence lying round us if the captain chanced to come down to inquire. The next man to us had a barny with the man above him about the same thing. Then the peel was scattered round pretty fairly, or thrown into an empty bunk, and no man

dared growl lest he should come to be regarded as a blackleg—a would-be informer.

The men opposite the door kept a look-out; and two Australian jokers sat in the top end berth, with their legs hanging over and swinging contentedly, and the porthole open ready for a swift and easy disposal of circumstantial evidence on the first alarm. They were eating a pineapple which they had sliced and extracted in sections from a crate up on deck. They looked so chummy and so school-boyishly happy and contented, that they reminded us of the days long ago when we were so high.

The chaps had a talk about those oranges on deck next day.

The commercial traveller said we had a right to the oranges, because the company didn't give us enough to eat. He said that we were already suffering from insufficient proper nourishment, and he'd tell the doctor so if the doctor came on board at Auckland. Anyway, it was no sin to rob a company.

"But then," said our comedian, "those oranges, perhaps, were sent over by a poor, struggling orange grower, with a wife and family to keep, and he'll have to bear the loss, and a few bob might make a lot of difference to him. It ain't right to rob a poor man."

This made us feel doubtful and mean, and one or two got uncomfortable and shifted round uneasily.

But presently the traveller came to the rescue. He said that no doubt the oranges belonged to a middle-man, and the middle-man was the curse of the country. We felt better.

Towards the end of the trip the women began to turn up. There were five grass widows, and every female of them had a baby. The Australian marries young and poor; and, when he can live no longer in his native land, he sells the furniture, buys a steerage ticket to New Zealand or Western Australia, and leaves his wife with her relatives or friends until he earns enough money to send for her. Four of our women were girl-wives, and mostly pretty. One little handful of a thing had a fine baby boy, nearly as big as herself, and she looked so fragile and pale, and pretty and lonely, and had such an appealing light in her big shadowed brown eyes, and such a pathetic droop at the corners of her sweet little mouth, that you longed to take her in your manly arms — baby and all — and comfort her.

The last afternoon on high seas was spent in looking through glasses for the Pinnacles, off North Cape. And, as we neared the land, the commercial traveller remarked that he wouldn't mind if there was a wreck now—provided we all got saved. "We'd have all our names in the papers," he said. "Gallant conduct of the passengers and crew.

Heroic rescue by Mr. So-and-so—climbing the cliffs with a girl under his arm, and all that sort of thing."

The chaps smiled a doleful smile, and turned away again to look at the Promised Land. They had had no anxiety to speak of for the last two or three days; but now they were again face to face with the cursed question, "How to make a living." They were wondering whether or not they would get work in New Zealand, and feeling more doubtful about it than when they embarked.

Pity we couldn't go to sea and sail away for ever, and never see land any more—or, at least, not till better and brighter days—if they ever come.

THE STORY OF MALACHI

MALACHI was very tall, very thin, and very round-shouldered, and the sandiness of his hair also cried aloud for an adjective. All the boys considered Malachi the greatest ass on the station, and there was no doubt that he *was* an awful fool. He had never been out of his native bush in all his life, excepting once, when he paid a short visit to Sydney, and when he returned it was evident that his nerves had received a shaking. We failed to draw one word out of Malachi regarding his views on the city—to describe it was not in his power, for it had evidently been something far beyond his comprehension. Even after his visit had become a matter of history, if you were to ask him what he thought of Sydney the dazed expression would come back into his face, and he would scratch his head and say in a slow and deliberate manner, "Well, there's no mistake, it's a caution." And as such the city remained, so far as Malachi's opinion of it was concerned.

Malachi was always shabbily dressed, in spite of his pound a week and board, and "When Malachi gets a new suit of clothes" was the expression invariably used by the boys to fix a date for some

altogether improbable event. We were always having larks with Malachi, for we looked upon him as our legitimate butt. He seldom complained, and when he did his remonstrance hardly ever went beyond repeating the words, "Now, none of your pranktical jokes!" If this had not the desired effect, and we put up some too outrageous trick on him, he would content himself by muttering with sorrowful conviction, "Well, there's no mistake, it's a caution."

We were not content with common jokes, such as sewing up the legs of Malachi's trousers while he slept, "fixing" his bunk, or putting explosives in his pipe—we aspired to some of the higher branches of the practical joker's art. It was well known that Malachi had an undying hatred for words of four syllables and over, and the use of them was always sufficient to forfeit any good opinions he might have previously entertained concerning the user. "I hate them high-flown words," he would say—"I got a book at home that I could get them all out of if I wanted them; but I don't." The book referred to was a very dilapidated dictionary. Malachi's hatred for high-flown words was only equalled by his aversion to the opposite sex; and, this being known, we used to write letters to him in a feminine hand, threatening divers breach of promise actions, and composed in the high-flown language above alluded to. We used to think this very funny, and by these means we made his life

a burden to him. Malachi put the most implicit faith in everything we told him; he would take in the most improbable yarn provided we preserved a grave demeanour and used no high-flown expressions. He would indeed sometimes remark that our yarns were a caution, but that was all.

We played upon him the most gigantic joke of all during the visit of a certain bricklayer, who came to do some work at the homestead. "Bricky" was a bit of a phrenologist, and knew enough of physiognomy and human nature to give a pretty fair delineation of character. He also went in for spirit-rapping, greatly to the disgust of the two ancient housekeepers, who declared that they'd have "no dalins wid him and his divil's worruk."

The bricklayer was from the first an object of awe to Malachi, who carefully avoided him; but one night we got the butt into a room where the artisan was entertaining the boys with a *séance*. After the table-rapping, during which Malachi sat with uncovered head and awe-struck expression, we proposed that he should have his "bumps" told, and before he could make his escape Malachi was seated in a chair in the middle of the room and the bricklayer was running his fingers over his head. I really believe that Malachi's hair bristled between the phrenologist's fingers. Whenever he made a hit his staunch admirer, "The Donegal," would exclaim, "Look at that now!" while the girls tittered and said, "Just fancy!" and from time to time Malachi

would be heard to mutter to himself, in a tone of the most intense conviction, that without the least mistake it was a caution. Several times at his work the next day Malachi was observed to rest on his spade, while he tilted his hat forward with one hand and felt the back of his head as though he had not been previously aware of its existence.

We "ran" Malachi to believe that the bricklayer was mad on the subject of phrenology, and was suspected of having killed several persons in order to obtain their skulls for experimental purposes. We further said that he had been heard to say that Malachi's skull was a most extraordinary one, and so we advised him to be careful.

Malachi occupied a hut some distance from the station, and one night, the last night of the bricklayer's stay, as Malachi sat smoking over the fire the door opened quietly and the phrenologist entered. He carried a bag with a pumpkin in the bottom of it, and, sitting down on a stool, he let the bag down with a bump on the floor between his feet. Malachi was badly scared, but he managed to stammer out—

"'Ello!"

"'Ello!" said the phrenologist.

There was an embarrassing silence, which was at last broken by "Bricky" saying: "How are you gettin' on, Malachi?"

"Oh, jist right," replied Malachi.

Nothing was said for a while, until Malachi, after

fidgeting a good deal on his stool, asked the bricklayer when he was leaving the station.

"Oh, I'm going away in the morning early," said he. "I've jist been over to Jimmy Nowlett's camp, and as I was passing I thought I'd call and get your head."

"What?"

"I come for your skull."

"Yes," the phrenologist continued, while Malachi sat horror-stricken; "I've got Jimmy Nowlett's skull here," and he lifted the bag and lovingly felt the pumpkin—it must have weighed forty pounds. "I spoilt one of his best bumps with the tomahawk. I had to hit him twice, but it's no use crying over spilt milk." Here he drew a heavy shingling-hammer out of the bag and wiped off with his sleeve something that looked like blood. Malachi had been edging round for the door, and now he made a rush for it. But the skull-fancier was there before him.

"Gor-sake, you don't want to murder me!" gasped Malachi.

"Not if I can get your skull any other way," said Bricky.

"Oh!" gasped poor Malachi—and then, with a vague idea that it was best to humour a lunatic, he continued, in a tone meant to be off-hand and careless—"Now, look here, if yer only waits till I die you can have my whole skelington and welcome."

"Now, Malachi," said the phrenologist sternly,

"d'ye think I'm a fool? I ain't going to stand any humbug. If yer acts sensible you'll be quiet, and it'll soon be over, but if yer——"

Malachi did not wait to hear the rest. He made a spring for the back of the hut and through it, taking down a large new sheet of stringy-bark in his flight. Then he could be heard loudly ejaculating "It's a caution!" as he went through the bush like a startled kangaroo, and he didn't stop till he reached the station.

Jimmy Nowlett and I had been peeping through a crack in the same sheet of bark that Malachi dislodged; it fell on us and bruised us somewhat, but it wasn't enough to knock the fun out of the thing.

When Jimmy Nowlett crawled out from under the bark he had to lie down on Malachi's bunk to laugh, and even for some time afterwards it was not unusual for Jimmy to wake up in the night and laugh till we wished him dead.

I should like to finish here, but there remains something more to be said about Malachi.

One of the best cows at the homestead had a calf, about which she made a great deal of fuss. She was ordinarily a quiet, docile creature, though somewhat fussy after calving, and no one ever dreamed that she would injure any one. It happened one day that the squatter's daughter and her intended husband, a Sydney exquisite, were strolling in a paddock where the cow was. Whether the cow

objected to the masher or his lady-love's red parasol, or whether she suspected designs upon her progeny, is not certain; anyhow, she went for them. The young man saw the cow coming first, and he gallantly struck a bee-line for the fence, leaving the girl to manage for herself. She wouldn't have managed very well if Malachi hadn't been passing just then. He saw the girl's danger, and ran to intercept the cow with no weapon but his hands.

It didn't last long. There was a roar, a rush, and a cloud of dust, out of which the cow presently emerged, and went scampering back to the bush in which her calf was hidden.

We carried Malachi home and laid him on a bed. He had a terrible wound in the groin, and the blood soaked through the bandages like water. We did all that was possible for him, the boys killed the squatter's best horse and spoilt two others riding for a doctor, but it was of no use. In the last half-hour of his life we all gathered round Malachi's bed; he was only twenty-two. Once he said:

"I wonder how mother'll manage now?"

"Why, where's your mother?" some one asked gently; we had never dreamt that Malachi might have some one to love him and be proud of him.

"In Bathurst," he answered wearily—"she'll take on awful, I 'spect, she was awful fond of me—we've been pulling together this last ten years—mother and me—we wanted to make it all right for my little brother Jim—poor Jim!"

"What's wrong with Jim?" some one asked.

"Oh, he's blind," said Malachi—"always was—we wanted to make it all right for him agin time he grows up—I—I managed to send home about—about forty pounds a year—we bought a bit of ground, and—and—I think—I'm—going now. Tell 'em, Harry—tell 'em how it was——"

I had to go outside then. I couldn't stand it any more. There was a lump in my throat, and I'd have given anything to wipe out my share in the practical jokes, but it was too late now.

Malachi was dead when I went in again, and that night the hat went round with the squatter's cheque in the bottom of it, and we made it "all right" for Malachi's blind brother Jim.

STEELMAN'S PUPIL

STEELMAN was a hard case, but some said that Smith was harder. Steelman was big and good-looking, and good-natured in his way; he was a "spieler," pure and simple, but did things in humorous style. Smith was small and weedy, of the sneak variety; he had a whining tone and a cringing manner. He seemed to be always so afraid you were going to hit him that he would make you *want* to hit him on that account alone.

Steelman "had" you in a fashion that would make your friends laugh. Smith would "have" you in a way which made you feel mad at the bare recollection of having been taken in by so contemptible a little sneak.

They battled round together in the North Island of Maoriland for a couple of years.

One day Steelman said to Smith:

"Look here, Smithy, you don't know you're born yet. I'm going to take you in hand and teach you."

And he did. If Smith wouldn't do as Steelman told him, or wasn't successful in cadging, or "mugged" any game they had in hand, Steelman

would threaten to "stoush" him; and, if the warning proved ineffectual after the second or third time, he *would* stoush him.

One day, on the track, they came to a place where an old Scottish couple kept a general store and shanty. They camped alongside the road, and Smith was just starting up to the house to beg supplies when Steelman cried:

"Here!—hold on. Now where do you think you're going to?"

"Why, I'm going to try and chew the old party's lug, of course. We'll be out of tucker in a couple of days," said Smith.

Steelman sat down on a stump in a hopeless, discouraged sort of way.

"It's no use," he said, regarding Smith with mingled reproach and disgust. "It's no use. I might as well give it best. I can see that it's only waste of time trying to learn you anything. Will I ever be able to knock some gumption into your thick skull? After all the time and trouble and pains I've took with your education, you hain't got any more sense than to go and mug a business like that! When will you learn sense? Hey? After all, I—— Smith, you're a born mug!"

He always called Smith a "mug" when he was particularly wild at him, for it hurt Smith more than anything else.

"There's only two classes in the world, spielers and mugs—and you're a mug, Smith."

"What have I done, anyway?" asked Smith helplessly. "That's all I want to know."

Steelman wearily rested his brow on his hand.

"That will do, Smith," he said listlessly; "don't say another word, old man; it'll only make my head worse; don't talk. You might, at the very least, have a little consideration for my feelings—even if you haven't for your own interests." He paused and regarded Smith sadly. "Well, I'll give you another show. I'll stage the business for you."

He made Smith doff his coat and get into his worst pair of trousers—and they were bad enough; they were hopelessly "gone," beyond the extreme limit of bush decency. He made Smith put on a rag of a felt hat and a pair of "'lastic sides" which had fallen off a tramp and lain baking and rotting by turns on a rubbish heap; they had to be tied on Smith with bits of rag and string. He drew dark shadows round Smith's eyes, and burning spots on his cheek-bones with some grease-paints he used when they travelled as "The Great Steelman and Smith Combination Star Shakesperian Dramatic Co." He damped Smith's hair to make it dark and lank, and his face more corpse-like by comparison—in short, he "made him up" to look like a man who had long passed the very last stage of consumption, and had been artificially kept alive in the interests of science.

"Now you're ready," said Steelman to Smith. "You left your *whare* the day before yesterday and

started to walk to the hospital at Palmerston. An old mate picked you up dying on the road, brought you round, and carried you on his back most of the way here. You firmly believe that Providence had something to do with the sending of that old mate along at that time and place above all others. Your mate also was hard-up; he was going to a job—the first show for work he'd had in nine months—but he gave it up to see you through; he'd give up his life rather than desert a mate in trouble. You only want a couple of shillings or a bit of tucker to help you on to Palmerston. You know you've got to die, and you only want to live long enough to get word to your poor old mother, and die on a bed.

"Remember, they're Scotch up at that house. You understand the Scotch barrack pretty well by now—if you don't it ain't my fault. You were born in Aberdeen, but came out too young to remember much about the town. Your father's dead. You ran away to sea and came out in the *Bobbie Burns* to Sydney. Your poor old mother's in Aberdeen now—Bruce or Wallace Wynd will do. Your mother might be dead now—poor old soul!—anyway, you'll never see her again. You wish you'd never run away from home. You wish you'd been a better son to your poor old mother; you wish you'd written to her and answered her last letter. You only want to live long enough to write home and ask for forgiveness and a blessing before you

die. If you had a drop of spirits of some sort to brace you up you might get along the road better. (Put this delicately.) Get the whine out of your voice and breathe with a wheeze—like this; get up the nearest approach to a death-rattle that you can. Move as if you were badly hurt in your wind —like this. (If you don't do it better'n that, I'll stoush you.) Make your face a bit longer and keep your lips dry—don't lick them, you damned fool! —*breathe* on them; make 'em dry as chips. That's the only decent pair of breeks you've got, and the only 'shoon.' You're a Presbyterian—not a U.P., the Auld Kirk. Your mate would have come up to the house, only—well, you'll have to use the stuffing in your head a bit; you can't expect me to do all the brain-work. Remember it's consumption you've got—galloping consumption; you know all the symptoms—pain on top of your right lung, bad cough and night sweats. Something tells you that you won't see the new year—it's a week off Christmas now. And, if you come back without anything, I'll blessed soon put you out of your misery."

. . . . . .

Smith came back with about four pounds of shortbread and as much various tucker as they could conveniently carry; a pretty good suit of cast-off tweeds; a new pair of 'lastic sides from the store stock; two bottles of patent medicine and a black bottle half-full of home-made consumption-

cure; also a letter to a hospital-committee man, and three shillings to help him on his way to Palmerston. He also got about half a mile of sympathy, religious consolation, and medical advice which he didn't remember.

"*Now*," he said triumphantly, "am I a mug or not?"

Steelman kindly ignored the question. "I *did* have a better opinion of the Scotch," he said contemptuously.

. . . . . .

Steelman got on at an hotel as billiard-marker and decoy, and in six months he managed that pub. Smith, who'd been away on his own account, turned up in the town one day clean-broke, and in a deplorable state. He heard of Steelman's luck, and thought he was "all right," so went to his old friend.

Cold type—or any other kind of type—couldn't do justice to Steelman's disgust. To think that this was the reward of all the time and trouble he'd spent on Smith's education! However, when he cooled down, he said:

"Smith, you're a young man yet, and it's never too late to mend. There is still time for reformation. I can't help you now; it would only demoralise you altogether. To think, after the way I trained you, you can't battle round any better'n this! I always thought you were an irreclaimable mug, but I expected better things of you towards

the end. I thought I'd make *something* of you. It's enough to dishearten any man and disgust him with the world. Why! you ought to be a rich man now with the chances and training you had! To think—but I won t talk of that; it has made me ill. I suppose I'll have to give you something, if it's only to get rid of the sight of you. Here's a quid, and I'm a mug for giving it to you. It'll do you more harm than good; and it ain't a friendly thing nor the right thing for me—who always had your welfare at heart—to give it to you under the circumstances. Now, get away out of my sight, and don't come near me till you've reformed. If you do, I'll have to stoush you out of regard for my own health and feelings."

. . . . . .

But Steelman came down in the world again and picked up Smith on the road, and they "battled round" together for another year or so; and at last they were in Wellington—Steelman "flush" and stopping at an hotel, and Smith stumped, as usual, and staying with a friend. One night they were drinking together at the hotel, at the expense of some mugs whom Steelman was "educating." It was raining hard. When Smith was going home, he said:

"Look here, Steely, old man. Listen to the rain! I'll get wringing wet going home. You might as well lend me your overcoat to-night. You won't want it, and I won't hurt it."

And, Steelman's heart being warmed by his successes, he lent the overcoat.

Smith went and pawned it, got glorious on the proceeds, and took the pawn-ticket to Steelman next day.

Smith had reformed.

. . . . . .

"And *I* taught him!" Steelman would say proudly in after years. "Poor old Smith. *He* could battle round all right. I taught him."

"BOARD AND RESIDENCE"

ONE o'clock on Saturday. The unemployed's one o'clock on Saturday! Nothing more can be done this week, so you drag yourself wearily and despairingly "home," with the cheerful prospect of a penniless Saturday afternoon and evening, and the long, horrible Australian-city Sunday to drag through. One of the landlady's clutch—and she *is* an old hen—opens the door, exclaims "Oh, Mr. Careless!" and grins. You wait an anxious minute, to postpone the disappointment which you feel by instinct is coming, and then ask hopelessly whether there are any letters for you.

"No, there's nothing for you, Mr. Careless." Then in answer to the unspoken question, "The postman's been, but there's nothing for you."

You hang up your hat in the stuffy little passage and start upstairs, when, "Oh, Mr. Careless, mother wants to know if you've had yer dinner?"

You haven't, but you say you have. You are empty enough inside, but the emptiness is filled up, as it were, with the wrong sort of hungry vacancy—gnawing anxiety. You haven't any stomach for the warm, tasteless mess which has been "kep'ot" for you in a cold stove. You feel just physically tired

enough to go to your room, lie down on the bed, and snatch twenty minutes' rest from that terrible unemployed restlessness which, you know, is sure to drag you to your feet to pace the room or tramp the pavement even before your bodily weariness has nearly left you. So you start up the narrow, stuffy little flight of steps called the "stairs." Three small doors open from the landing—a square place of about four feet by four. The first door is yours; it is open, and—

Decided odour of bedroom dust and "fluff," damped and kneaded with cold soapsuds. Rear view of a girl covered with a damp, draggled, dirt-coloured skirt, which gapes at the waistband from the "body," disclosing a good glimpse of soiled stays (ribs burst), and yawns behind over a decidedly dirty white petticoat, the slit of which last, as she reaches forward and backs out convulsively, half opens and then comes together in an unsatisfactory, startling, tantalising way, and allows a hint of a red flannel under-something. The frayed ends of the skirt lie across a hopelessly burst pair of elastic sides which rest on their inner edges—toes out—and jerk about in a seemingly undecided manner. She is damping and working up the natural layer on the floor with a piece of old flannel petticoat dipped occasionally in a bucket which stands by her side, containing about a quart of muddy water. She looks round and exclaims, "Oh, did you want to come in, Mr. Careless?" Then she says she'll

be done in a minute; furthermore she remarks that if you want to come in you won't be in her road. You don't;—you go down to the dining-room-parlour-sitting-room-nursery—and stretch yourself on the sofa in the face of the painfully evident disapproval of the landlady.

You have been here, say, three months, and are only about two weeks behind. The landlady still says, "Good morning, Mr. Careless," or "Good evening, Mr. Careless," but there is an unpleasant accent on the "Mr.," and a still more unpleasantly pronounced stress on the "morning" or "evening." While your money lasted you paid up well and regularly—sometimes in advance—and dined out most of the time; but that doesn't count now.

Ten minutes pass, and then the landlady's disapproval becomes manifest and aggressive. One of the little girls, a sharp-faced little larrikiness, who always wears a furtive grin of cunning—it seems as though it were born with her, and is perhaps more a misfortune than a fault—comes in and says please she wants to tidy up.

So you get up and take your hat and go out again to look for a place to rest in—to try not to think.

You *wish* you could get away up-country. You also wish you were dead.

The landlady, Mrs. Jones, is a widow, or grass-widow, Welsh, of course, and clannish; flat face,

watery grey eyes, shallow, selfish, ignorant, and a hypocrite unconsciously—by instinct.

But the worst of it is that Mrs. Jones takes advantage of the situation to corner you in the passage when you want to get out, or when you come in tired, and talk. It amounts to about this. She has been fourteen years in this street, taking in boarders; everybody knows her; everybody knows Mrs. Jones; her poor husband died six years ago (God rest his soul); she finds it hard to get a living these times; work, work, morning, noon, and night (talk, talk, talk, more likely). "Do you know Mr. Duff of the Labour Bureau?" He has known her family for years; a very nice gentleman—a very nice gentleman indeed; he often stops at the gate to have a yarn with her on his way to the office (he must be hard up for a yarn). She doesn't know hardly nobody in this street; she never gossips; it takes her all her time to get a living; she can't be bothered with neighbours; it's always best to keep to yourself and keep neighbours at a distance. Would you believe it, Mr. Careless, she has been two years in this house and hasn't said above a dozen words to the woman next door; she'd just know her by sight if she saw her; as for the other woman she wouldn't know her from a crow. Mr. Blank and Mrs. Blank could tell you the same. . . . She always had gentlemen staying with her; she never had no cause to complain of one of them except once; they always treated her

fair and honest. Here follows story about the exception; he, I gathered, was a journalist, and she could never depend on him. He seemed, from her statements, to have been decidedly erratic in his movements, mode of life, and choice of climes. He evidently caused her a great deal of trouble and anxiety, and I felt a kind of sneaking sympathy for his memory. One young fellow stayed with her five years; he was, &c. She couldn't be hard on any young fellow that gets out of work; of course if he can't get it he can't pay; she can't get blood out of a stone; she couldn't turn him out in the street. "I've got sons of my own, Mr. Careless, I've got sons of my own." . . . She is sure she always does her best to make her boarders comfortable, and if they want anything they've only got to ask for it. The kettle is always on the stove if you want a cup of tea, and if you come home late at night and want a bit of supper you've only got to go to the safe (which of us would dare?) She never locks it, she never did. . . . And then she begins about her wonderful kids, and it goes on hour after hour. Lord! it's enough to drive a man mad.

We were recommended to this place on the day of our arrival by a young dealer in the furniture line, whose name was Moses—and he looked like it, but we didn't think of that at the time. He had Mrs. Jones's card in his window, and he left the

shop in charge of his missus and came round with us at once. He assured us that we couldn't do better than stay with her. He said she was a most respectable lady, and all her boarders were decent young fellows—gentlemen; she kept everything scrupulously clean, and kept the best table in town, and she'd do for us (washing included) for eighteen shillings per week: she generally took the first week in advance. We asked him to have a beer—for the want of somebody else to ask—and after that he said that Mrs. Jones was a kind, motherly body, and understood young fellows; and that we'd be even more comfortable than in our own home; that we'd be allowed to do as we liked—she wasn't particular; she wouldn't mind it a bit if we came home late once in a way—she was used to that, in fact; she liked to see young fellows enjoying themselves. We afterwards found out that he got so much on every boarder he captured. We also found out—after paying in advance—that her gentlemen generally sent out their white things to be done; she only did the coloured things, so we had to pay a couple of bob extra a week to have our biled rags and collars sent out and done; and after the first week they bore sad evidence of having been done on the premises by one of the frowsy daughters. But we paid all the same. And, good Lord! if she keeps the best table in town, we are curious to see the worst. When you go down to breakfast you find on the table in front of

your chair a cold plate, with a black something—God knows what it looks like—in the centre of it. It eats like something scraped off the inside of a hide and burnt; and with this you have a cup of warm grey slush called a "cup of tea." Dinner: a slice of alleged roast beef or boiled mutton, of no particular colour or taste; three new spuds, of which the largest is about the size of an ordinary hen's egg, the smallest that of a bantam's, and the middle one in between, and which eat soggy and have no taste to speak of, save that they are a trifle bitter; a dab of unhealthy-looking green something, which might be either cabbage leaves or turnip tops, and a glass of water. The whole mess is lukewarm, including the water—it would all be better cold. Tea: a thin slice of the aforesaid alleged roast or mutton, and the pick of about six thin slices of stale bread—evidently cut the day before yesterday. This is the way Mrs. Jones "does" for us for eighteen shillings a week. The bread gave out at tea-time this evening, and a mild financial boarder tapped his plate with his knife, and sent the bread plate out to be replenished. It came back with *one* slice on it.

The mild financial boarder, with desperate courage, is telling the landlady that he'll have to shift next week—it is too far to go to work, he cannot always get down in time; he is very sorry he has to go, he says; he is very comfortable here, but it can't be helped; anyway, as soon as he can get work

nearer, he'll come back at once; also (oh, what cowards men are when women are concerned), he says he wishes she could shift and take a house down at the other end of the town. She says (at least here are some fragments of her gabble which we caught and shorthanded): "Well, I'm very sorry to lose you, Mr. Sampson, very sorry indeed; but of course if you must go, you must. Of course you can't be expected to walk that distance every morning, and you mustn't be getting to work late, and losing your place . . . Of course we could get breakfast an hour earlier if . . . Well, as I said before, I'm sorry to lose you and, indeed . . . You won't forget to come and see us . . . glad to see you at any time . . . Well, anyway, if you ever want to come back, you know, your bed will be always ready for you, and you'll be treated just the same, and made just as comfortable—you won't forget that" (he says he won't); "and you won't forget to come to dinner sometimes" (he says he won't); "and, of course . . . You know I always try . . . Don't forget to drop in sometimes . . . Well, anyway, if you ever do happen to hear of a decent young fellow who wants a good, clean, comfortable home, you'll be sure to send him to me, will you?" (He says he will.) "Well, of course, Mr. Sampson, &c., &c., &c., &c., and-so-on, and-so-on, and-so-on, and-so-on . . ." It's enough to give a man rats.

He escapes, and we regard his departure very much as a gang of hopeless convicts might regard the unexpected liberation of one of their number.

This is the sort of life that gives a man a God-Almighty longing to break away and take to the bush.

TWO DOGS AND A FENCE

"NOTHING makes a dog madder," said Mitchell, "than to have another dog come outside his fence and sniff and bark at him through the cracks when he can't get out. The other dog might be an entire stranger; he might be an old chum, and he mightn't bark—only sniff—but it makes no difference to the inside dog. The inside dog generally starts it, and the outside dog only loses his temper and gets wild because the inside dog has lost *his* and got mad and made such a stinking fuss about nothing at all; and then the outside dog barks back and makes matters a thousand times worse, and the inside dog foams at the mouth and dashes the foam about, and goes at it like a million steel traps.

"I can't tell why the inside dog gets so wild about it in the first place, except, perhaps, because he thinks the outside dog has taken him at a disadvantage and is "poking it at him"; anyway, he gets madder the longer it lasts, and at last he gets savage enough to snap off his own tail and tear it to bits, because he can't get out and chew up that other dog; and, if he did get out, he'd kill the other dog, or try to, even if it was his own brother.

Sometimes the outside dog only smiles and trots

off; sometimes he barks back good-humouredly; sometimes he only just gives a couple of disinterested barks as if he isn't particular, but is expected, because of his dignity and doghood, to say something under the circumstances; and sometimes, if the outside dog is a little dog, he'll get away from that fence in a hurry on the first surprise, or, if he's a cheeky little dog, he'll first make sure that the inside dog can't get out, and then he'll have some fun.

"It's amusing to see a big dog, of the Newfoundland kind, sniffing along outside a fence with a broad, good-natured grin on his face all the time the inside dog is whooping away at the rate of thirty whoops a second, and choking himself, and covering himself with foam, and dashing the spray through the cracks, and jolting and jerking every joint in his body up to the last joint in his tail.

"Sometimes the inside dog is a little dog, and the smaller he is the more row he makes—but then he knows he's safe. And, sometimes, as I said before, the outside dog is a short-tempered dog who hates a row, and never wants to have a disagreement with anybody—like a good many peaceful men, who hate rows, and are always nice and civil and pleasant in a nasty, unpleasant, surly, sneering sort of civil way that makes you want to knock their heads off; men who never start a row, but keep it going, and make it a thousand times worse when it's once started, just because they didn't start

it—and keep on saying so, and that the other party did. The short-tempered outside dog gets wild at the other dog for losing his temper, and says:

"'What are you making such a fuss about? What's the matter with you, anyway? Hey?'

"And the inside dog says:

"'Who do you think you're talking to? You——! I'll——' &c., &c., &c.

"Then the outside dog says:

"'Why, you're worse than a flaming old slut!'

"*Then* they go at it, and you can hear them miles off, like a Chinese war—like a hundred great guns firing eighty blank cartridges a minute; till the outside dog is just as wild to get inside and eat the inside dog as the inside dog is to get out and disembowel *him*. Yet, if those same two dogs were to meet casually outside they might get chummy at once, and be the best of friends, and swear everlasting mateship, and take each other home."

MACQUARIE'S MATE

THE chaps in the bar of Stiffner's Shanty were talking about Macquarie, an absent shearer, who seemed, from their conversation, to be better known than liked by them.

"I ain't seen Macquarie for ever so long," remarked Box-o'-Tricks, after a pause. "Wonder where he could 'a' got to?"

"Gaol, p'r'aps—or hell," growled Barcoo. "He ain't much loss, any road."

"My oath, yer right, Barcoo!" interposed "Sally" Thompson. "But, now I come to think of it, old Awful Example there was a mate of his one time. Bless'd if the old soaker ain't comin' to life again!"

A shaky, rag-and-dirt-covered framework of a big man rose uncertainly from a corner of the room, and, staggering forward, brushed the staring thatch back from his forehead with one hand, reached blindly for the edge of the bar with the other, and drooped heavily.

"Well, Awful Example," demanded the shanty-keeper. "What's up with you now?"

The drunkard lifted his head and glared wildly round with bloodshot eyes.

"Don't you—don't you talk about him! *Drop it*, I say! DROP it!"

"What the devil's the matter with you now, anyway?" growled the barman. "Got 'em again? Hey?"

"Don't you—don't you talk about Macquarie! He's a mate of mine! Here! Gimme a drink!"

"Well, what if he is a mate of yours?" sneered Barcoo. "It don't reflec' much credit on you—nor him neither."

The logic contained in the last three words was unanswerable, and Awful Example was still fairly reasonable, even when rum oozed out of him at every pore. He gripped the edge of the bar with both hands, let his ruined head fall forward until it was on a level with his temporarily rigid arms, and stared blindly at the dirty floor; then he straightened himself up, still keeping his hold on the bar.

"Some of you chaps," he said huskily; "*one* of you chaps, in this bar to-day, called Macquarie a scoundrel, and a loafer, and a blackguard, and—and a sneak, and a liar."

"Well, what if we did?" said Barcoo defiantly. "He's all that, and a cheat into the bargain. And, now, what are you going to do about it?"

The old man swung sideways to the bar, rested his elbow on it, and his head on his hand.

"Macquarie wasn't a sneak and he wasn't a liar," he said in a quiet, tired tone; "and Macquarie wasn't a cheat!"

"Well, old man, you needn't get your rag out about it," said Sally Thompson soothingly. "P'r'aps we was a bit too hard on him; and it isn't altogether right, chaps, considerin' he's not here. But then, you know, Awful, he might have acted straight to you that was his mate. The meanest blank—if he is a man at all—will do that."

"Oh, to blazes with the old sot!" shouted Barcoo. "I gave my opinion about Macquarie, and, what's more, I'll stand to it."

"I've got—I've got a point for the defence," the old man went on, without heeding the interruptions. "I've got a point or two for the defence."

"Well, let's have it," said Stiffner.

"In the first place—in the first place, Macquarie never talked about no man behind his back."

There was an uneasy movement, and a painful silence. Barcoo reached for his drink and drank it slowly; he needed time to think—Box-o'-Tricks studied his boots—Sally Thompson looked out at the weather—the shanty-keeper wiped the top of the bar very hard—and the rest shifted round and "s'posed they'd try a game er cards."

Barcoo set his glass down very softly, pocketed his hands deeply and defiantly, and said:

"Well, what of that? Macquarie was as strong as a bull, and the greatest bully on the river into the bargain. He could call a man a liar to his face—and smash his face afterwards. And he did it often, too, and with smaller men than himself."

There was a breath of relief in the bar.

"Do you want to make out that I'm talking about a man behind his back?" continued Barcoo, threateningly, to Awful Example. "You'd best take care, old man."

"Macquarie wasn't a coward," remonstrated the drunkard softly, but in an injured tone.

"What's up with you, anyway?" yelled the publican. "What yer growling at? D'ye want a row? Get out if yer can't be agreeable!"

The boozer swung his back to the bar, hooked himself on by his elbows, and looked vacantly out of the door.

"I've got—another point for the defence," he muttered. "It's always best—it's always best to keep the last point till—till the last."

"Oh, Lord! Well, out with it! *Out with it!*"

"*Macquarie's dead!* That's—that's what it is!"

Every one moved uneasily: Sally Thompson turned the other side to the bar, crossed one leg behind the other, and looked down over his hip at the sole and heel of his elastic-side—the barman rinsed the glasses vigorously—Longbones shuffled and dealt on the top of a cask, and some of the others gathered round him and got interested—Barcoo thought he heard his horse breaking away, and went out to see to it, followed by Box-o'-Tricks and a couple more, who thought that it might be one of their horses.

Some one — a tall, gaunt, determined-looking bushman, with square features and haggard grey

eyes—had ridden in unnoticed through the scrub to the back of the shanty and dismounted by the window.

When Barcoo and the others re-entered the bar it soon became evident that Sally Thompson had been thinking, for presently he came to the general rescue as follows:

"There's a blessed lot of tommy rot about dead people in this world—a lot of damned old woman nonsense. There's more sympathy wasted over dead and rotten skunks than there is justice done to straight, honest-livin' chaps. I don't b'lieve in this gory sentiment about the dead at the expense of the living. I b'lieve in justice for the livin—and the dead too, for that matter—but justice for the livin'. Macquarie was a bad egg, and it don't alter the case if he was dead a thousand times."

There was another breath of relief in the bar, and presently somebody said: "Yer right, Sally!"

"Good for you, Sally, old man!" cried Box-o'-Tricks, taking it up. "An', besides, I don't b'lieve Macquarie is dead at all. He's always dyin', or being reported dead, and then turnin' up again. Where did you hear about it, Awful?"

The Example ruefully rubbed a corner of his roof with the palm of his hand.

"There's—there's a lot in what you say, Sally Thompson," he admitted slowly, totally ignoring Box-o'-Tricks. "But—but——"

"Oh, we've had enough of the old fool," yelled

Barcoo. "Macquarie was a spieler, and any man that 'ud be his mate ain't much better."

"Here, take a drink and dry up, yer ole hass!" said the man behind the bar, pushing a bottle and glass towards the drunkard. "D'ye want a row?"

The old man took the bottle and glass in his shaking hands and painfully poured out a drink.

"There's a lot in what Sally Thompson says," he went on obstinately, "but—but," he added in a strained tone, "there's another point that I near forgot, and none of you seemed to think of it—not even Sally Thompson nor—nor Box-o'-Tricks there."

Stiffner turned his back, and Barcoo spat viciously and impatiently.

"Yes," drivelled the drunkard, "I've got another point for — for the defence — of my mate, Macquarie——"

"Oh, out with it! Spit it out, for God's sake, or you'll bust!" roared Stiffner. "What the blazes is it?"

"HIS MATE'S ALIVE!" yelled the old man. "Macquarie's mate's alive! That's what it is!"

He reeled back from the bar, dashed his glass and hat to the boards, gave his pants a hitch by the waistband that almost lifted him off his feet, and tore at his shirt-sleeves.

"Make a ring, boys," he shouted. "His mate's alive! Put up your hands, Barcoo! By God, his mate's alive!"

Some one had turned his horse loose at the rear,

and had been standing by the back door for the last five minutes. Now he slipped quietly in.

"Keep the old fool off, or he'll get hurt," snarled Barcoo.

Stiffner jumped the counter. There were loud, hurried words of remonstrance, then some stump-splitting oaths and a scuffle, consequent upon an attempt to chuck the old man out. Then a crash. Stiffner and Box-o'-Tricks were down, two others were holding Barcoo back, and some one had pinned Awful Example by the shoulders from behind.

"Let me go!" he yelled, too blind with passion to notice the movements of surprise among the men before him. "Let me go! I'll smash—any man—that—that says a word again' a mate of mine behind his back. Barcoo, I'll have your blood! Let me go! I'll—I'll—I'll—— Who's holdin' me? You—you——"

"It's Macquarie, old mate!" said a quiet voice.

Barcoo thought he heard his horse again, and went out in a hurry. Perhaps he thought that the horse would get impatient and break loose if he left it any longer, for he jumped into the saddle and rode off.

THE SHANTY-KEEPER'S WIFE

THERE were about a dozen of us jammed into the coach, on the box seat and hanging on to the roof and tailboard as best we could. We were shearers, bagmen, agents, a squatter, a cockatoo, the usual joker—and one or two professional spielers, perhaps. We were tired and stiff and nearly frozen —too cold to talk and too irritable to risk the inevitable argument which an interchange of ideas would have led up to. We had been looking forward for hours, it seemed, to the pub where we were to change horses. For the last hour or two all that our united efforts had been able to get out of the driver was a grunt to the effect that it was "'bout a couple o' miles." Then he said, or grunted, "'Tain't fur now," a couple of times, and refused to commit himself any further; he seemed grumpy about having committed himself so far.

He was one of those men who take everything in dead earnest; who regard any expression of ideas outside their own sphere of life as trivial, or, indeed, if addressed directly to them, as offensive; who, in fact, are darkly suspicious of anything in the shape of a joke or laugh on the part of an outsider in their own particular dust-hole. He seemed to be

always thinking, and thinking a lot; when his hands were not both engaged, he would tilt his hat forward and scratch the base of his skull with his little finger, and let his jaw hang. But his intellectual powers were mostly concentrated on a doubtful swingle-tree, a misfitting collar, or that there bay or piebald (on the off or near side) with the sore shoulder.

Casual letters or papers, to be delivered on the road, were matters which troubled him vaguely, but constantly—like the abstract ideas of his passengers.

The joker of our party was a humourist of the dry order, and had been slyly taking rises out of the driver for the last two or three stages. But the driver only brooded. He wasn't the one to tell you straight if you offended him, or if he fancied you offended him, and thus gain your respect, or prevent a misunderstanding which would result in life-long enmity. He might meet you in after years when you had forgotten all about your trespass—if indeed you had ever been conscious of it—and "stoush" you unexpectedly on the ear.

Also you might regard him as your friend, on occasion, and yet he would stand by and hear a perfect stranger tell you the most outrageous lies, to your hurt, and know that the stranger was telling lies, and never put you up to it. It would never enter his head to do so. It wouldn't be any affair of his—only an abstract question.

It grew darker and colder. The rain came as if the frozen south were spitting at our face and neck and hands, and our feet grew as big as camels', and went dead, and we might as well have stamped the footboards with wooden legs for all the feeling we got into our own. But they were more comfortable that way, for the toes didn't curl up and pain so much, nor did our corns stick out so hard against the leather, and shoot.

We looked out eagerly for some clearing, or fence, or light—some sign of the shanty where we were to change horses—but there was nothing save blackness all round. The long, straight, cleared road was no longer relieved by the ghostly patch of light, far ahead, where the bordering tree-walls came together in perspective and framed the ether. We were down in the bed of the bush.

We pictured a haven of rest with a suspended lamp burning in the frosty air outside and a big log fire in a cosy parlour off the bar, and a long table set for supper. But this is a land of contradictions; wayside shanties turn up unexpectedly, and in the most unreasonable places, and are, as likely as not, prepared for a banquet when you are not hungry and can't wait, and as cold and dark as a bushman's grave when you are and can.

Suddenly the driver said: "We're there now." He said this as if he had driven us to the scaffold to be hanged, and was fiercely glad that he'd got us there safely at last. We looked but saw nothing;

then a light appeared ahead and seemed to come towards us; and presently we saw that it was a lantern held up by a man in a slouch hat, with a dark bushy beard, and a three-bushel bag around his shoulders. He held up his other hand, and said something to the driver in a tone that might have been used by the leader of a search party who had just found the body. The driver stopped and then went on slowly.

"What's up?" we asked. "What's the trouble?"

"Oh, it's all right," said the driver.

"The publican's wife is sick," somebody said, "and he wants us to come quietly."

The usual little slab and bark shanty was suggested in the gloom, with a big bark stable looming in the background. We climbed down like so many cripples. As soon as we began to feel our legs and be sure we had the right ones and the proper allowance of feet, we helped, as quietly as possible, to take the horses out and round to the stable.

"Is she very bad?" we asked the publican, showing as much concern as we could.

"Yes," he said, in a subdued voice of a rough man who had spent several anxious, sleepless nights by the sick-bed of a dear one. "But, God willing, I think we'll pull her through."

Thus encouraged we said, sympathetically: "We're very sorry to trouble you, but I suppose we could manage to get a drink and a bit to eat?"

"Well," he said, "there's nothing to eat in the house, and I've only got rum and milk. You can have that if you like."

One of the pilgrims broke out here.

"Well, of all the pubs," he began, "that I've ever——"

"Hush-sh-sh!" said the publican.

The pilgrim scowled and retired to the rear. You can't express your feelings freely when there's a woman dying close handy.

"Well, who says rum and milk?" asked the joker in a low voice.

"Wait here," said the publican, and disappeared into the little front passage.

Presently a light showed through a window, with a scratched and fly-bitten B and A on two panes, and a mutilated R on the third, which was broken. A door opened, and we sneaked into the bar. It was like having drinks after hours where the police are strict and independent.

When we came out the driver was scratching his head and looking at the harness on the verandah floor.

"You fellows 'll have ter put in the time for an hour or so. The horses is out back somewheres," and he indicated the interior of Australia with a side jerk of his head, "and the boy ain't back with 'em yet."

"But dash it all," said the Pilgrim, "me and my mate——"

"Hush!" said the publican.

"How long are the horses likely to be?" we asked the driver.

"Dunno," he grunted. "Might be three or four hours. It's all accordin'."

"Now, look here," said the Pilgrim, "me and my mate wanter catch the train."

"Hush-sh-sh!" from the publican in a fierce whisper.

"Well, boss," said the joker, "can you let us have beds, then? I don't want to freeze here all night, anyway."

"Yes," said the landlord, "I can do that, but some of you will have to sleep double and some of you'll have to take it out of the sofas, and one or two'll have to make a shakedown on the floor. There's plenty of bags in the stable, and you've got rugs and coats with you. Fix it up amongst yourselves."

"But look here!" interrupted the Pilgrim desperately, "we can't afford to wait! We're only 'battlers,' me and my mate, pickin' up crumbs by the wayside. We're got to catch the——"

"Hush!" said the publican savagely. "You fool, didn't I tell you my missus was bad? I won't have any noise."

"But look here," protested the Pilgrim, "we must catch the train at Dead Camel——"

"You'll catch my boot presently," said the publican, with a savage oath, "and go further than Dead

Camel. I won't have my missus disturbed for you or any other man! Just you shut up or get out, and take your blooming mate with you."

We lost patience with the Pilgrim and sternly took him aside.

"Now, for God's sake, hold your jaw," we said. "Haven't you got any consideration at all? Can't you see the man's wife is ill—dying perhaps—and he nearly worried off his head?"

The Pilgrim and his mate were scraggy little bipeds of the city push variety, so they were suppressed.

"Well," yawned the joker, "I'm not going to roost on a stump all night. I'm going to turn in."

"It'll be eighteenpence each," hinted the landlord. "You can settle now if you like to save time."

We took the hint, and had another drink. I don't know how we "fixed it up amongst ourselves," but we got settled down somehow. There was a lot of mysterious whispering and scuffling round by the light of a couple of dirty greasy bits of candle. Fortunately we dared not speak loud enough to have a row, though most of us were by this time in the humour to pick a quarrel with a long-lost brother.

The joker got the best bed, as good-humoured, good-natured chaps generally do, without seeming to try for it. The growler of the party got the floor and chaff bags, as selfish men mostly do—without

seeming to try for it either. I took it out of one of the "sofas," or rather that sofa took it out of me. It was short and narrow and down by the head, with a leaning to one corner on the outside, and had more nails and bits of gin-case than original sofa in it.

I had been asleep for three seconds, it seemed, when somebody shook me by the shoulder and said:

"Take yer seats."

When I got out, the driver was on the box, and the others were getting rum and milk inside themselves (and in bottles) before taking their seats.

It was colder and darker than ever, and the South Pole seemed nearer, and pretty soon, but for the rum, we should have been in a worse fix than before.

There was a spell of grumbling. Presently some one said:

"I don't believe them horses was lost at all. I was round behind the stable before I went to bed, and seen horses there; and if they wasn't them same horses there, I'll eat 'em raw!"

"Would yer?" said the driver in a disinterested tone.

"I would," said the passenger. Then, with a sudden ferocity, "And you too!"

The driver said nothing. It was an abstract question which didn't interest him.

We saw that we were on delicate ground, and changed the subject for awhile. Then some one else said:

"I wonder where his missus was? I didn't see any signs of her about, or any other woman about the place, and we was pretty well all over it."

"Must have kept her in the stable," suggested the joker.

"No, she wasn't, for Scotty and that chap on the roof was there after bags."

"She might have been in the loft," reflected the joker.

"There was no loft," put in a voice from the top of the coach.

"I say, Mister—Mister man," said the joker suddenly to the driver, "was his missus sick at all?"

"I dunno," replied the driver. "She might have been. He said so, anyway. I ain't got no call to call a man a liar."

"See here," said the cannibalistic individual to the driver, in the tone of a man who has made up his mind for a row, "has that shanty-keeper got a wife at all?"

"I believe he has."

"And is she living with him?"

"No, she ain't—if yer wanter know."

"Then where is she?"

"I dunno. How am I to know? She left him three or four years ago. She was in Sydney last

time I heard of her. It ain't no affair of mine, anyways."

"And is there any woman about the place at all, driver?" inquired a professional wanderer reflectively.

"No—not that I knows on. There useter be a old black gin come pottering round sometimes, but I ain't seen her lately."

"And excuse me, driver, but is there any one round there at all?" inquired the professional wanderer, with the air of a conscientious writer, collecting material for an Australian novel from life, with an eye to detail.

"Naw," said the driver—and recollecting that he was expected to be civil and obliging to his employers' patrons, he added in surly apology, "Only the boss and the stableman, that I knows of." Then repenting of the apology, he asserted his manhood again, and asked, in a tone calculated to risk a breach of the peace, "Any more questions, gentlemen—while the shop's open?"

There was a long pause.

"Driver," asked the Pilgrim appealingly, "was them horses lost at all?"

"I dunno," said the driver. "He said they was. He's got the looking after them. It was nothing to do with me."

. . . . . .

"Twelve drinks at sixpence a drink"—said the joker, as if calculating to himself—"that's six bob,

and say, on an average, four shouts—that's one pound four. Twelve beds at eighteenpence a bed —that's eighteen shillings; and say ten bob in various drinks and the stuff we brought with us, that's two pound twelve. That publican didn't do so bad out of us in two hours."

We wondered how much the driver got out of it, but thought it best not to ask him.

. . . . . .

We didn't say much for the rest of the journey. There was the usual man who thought as much and knew all about it from the first, but he wasn't appreciated. We suppressed him. One or two wanted to go back and "stoush" that landlord, and the driver stopped the coach cheerfully at their request; but they said they'd come across him again, and allowed themselves to be persuaded out of it. It made us feel bad to think how we had allowed ourselves to be delayed, and robbed, and had sneaked round on tiptoe, and how we had sat on the inoffensive Pilgrim and his mate, and all on account of a sick wife who didn't exist.

The coach arrived at Dead Camel in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust, and we spread ourselves over the train and departed.

THE HERO OF REDCLAY

THE "boss-over-the-board" was leaning with his back to the wall between two shoots, reading a reference handed to him by a green-hand applying for work as picker-up or wool-roller—a shed rouse-about. It was terribly hot. I was slipping past to the rolling-tables, carrying three fleeces to save a journey; we were only supposed to carry two. The boss stopped me:

"You've got three fleeces there, young man?"

"Yes."

Notwithstanding the fact that I had just slipped a light ragged fleece into the belly-wool and bits basket, I felt deeply injured, and righteously and fiercely indignant at being pulled up. It was a fearfully hot day.

"If I catch you carrying three fleeces again," said the boss quietly, "I'll give you the sack."

"I'll take it now if you like," I said.

He nodded. "You can go on picking-up in this man's place," he said to the jackeroo, whose reference showed him to be a non-union man—a "free-labourer," as the pastoralists had it, or, in plain shed terms, "a blanky scab." He was now in the comfortable position of a non-unionist in a

union shed who had jumped into a sacked man's place.

Somehow the lurid sympathy of the men irritated me worse than the boss-over-the-board had done. It must have been on account of the heat, as Mitchell says. I was sick of the shed and the life. It was within a couple of days of cut-out, so I told Mitchell—who was shearing—that I'd camp up the Billabong and wait for him; got my cheque, rolled up my swag, got three days' tucker from the cook, said so-long to him, and tramped while the men were in the shed.

I camped at the head of the Billabong where the track branched, one branch running to Bourke, up the river, and the other out towards the Paroo—and hell.

About ten o'clock the third morning Mitchell came along with his cheque and his swag, and a new sheep-pup, and his quiet grin; and I wasn't too pleased to see that he had a shearer called "the Lachlan" with him.

The Lachlan wasn't popular at the shed. He was a brooding, unsociable sort of man, and it didn't make any difference to the chaps whether he had a union ticket or not. It was pretty well known in the shed—there were three or four chaps from the district he was reared in—that he'd done five years' hard for burglary. What surprised me was that Jack Mitchell seemed thick with him; often, when the Lachlan was sitting brooding and smoking by himself outside the hut after sunset, Mitchell would

perch on his heels alongside him and yarn. But no one else took notice of anything Mitchell did out of the common.

"Better camp with us till the cool of the evening," said Mitchell to the Lachlan, as they slipped their swags. "Plenty time for you to start after sundown, if you're going to travel to-night."

So the Lachlan was going to travel all night and on a different track. I felt more comfortable, and put the billy on. I did not care so much what he'd been or had done, but I was green and soft yet, and his presence embarrassed me.

They talked shearing, sheds, tracks, and a little unionism—the Lachlan speaking in a quiet voice and with a lot of sound, common sense, it seemed to me. He was tall and gaunt, and might have been thirty, or even well on in the forties. His eyes were dark brown and deep set, and had something of the dead-earnest sad expression you saw in the eyes of union leaders and secretaries—the straight men of the strikes of '90 and '91. I fancied once or twice I saw in his eyes the sudden furtive look of the "bad egg" when a mounted trooper is spotted near the shed; but perhaps this was prejudice. And with it all there was about the Lachlan something of the man who has lost all he had and the chances of all he was ever likely to have, and is past feeling or caring or flaring up—past getting mad about anything—something, all the same, that warned men not to make free with him.

He and Mitchell fished along the Billabong all the afternoon; I fished a little, and lay about the camp and read. I had an instinct that the Lachlan saw I didn't cotton on to his camping with us, though he wasn't the sort of man to show what he saw or felt. After tea, and a smoke at sunset, he shouldered his swag, nodded to me as if I was an accidental but respectful stranger at a funeral that belonged to him, and took the outside track. Mitchell walked along the track with him for a mile or so, while I poked round and got some boughs down for a bed, and fed and studied the collie pup that Jack had bought from the shearers' cook.

I saw them stop and shake hands out on the dusty clearing, and they seemed to take a long time about it; then Mitchell started back, and the other began to dwindle down to a black peg and then to a dot on the sandy plain, that had just a hint of dusk and dreamy far-away gloaming on it between the change from glaring day to hard, bare, broad moonlight.

I thought Mitchell was sulky, or had got the blues, when he came back; he lay on his elbow smoking, with his face turned from the camp towards the plain. After a bit I got wild—if Mitchell was going to go on like that he might as well have taken his swag and gone with the Lachlan. I don't know exactly what was the matter with me that day, but at last I made up my mind to bring the thing to a head.

"You seem mighty thick with the Lachlan," I said.

"Well, what's the matter with that?" asked Mitchell. "It ain't the first felon I've been on speaking terms with. I borrowed half-a-caser off a murderer once, when I was in a hole and had no one else to go to; and the murderer hadn't served his time, neither. I've got nothing against the Lachlan, except that he's a white man and bears a faint family resemblance to a certain branch of my tribe."

I rolled out my swag on the boughs, got my pipe, tobacco, and matches handy in the crown of a spare hat, and lay down.

Mitchell got up, relit his pipe at the fire, and mooned round for awhile, with his hands behind him, kicking sticks out of the road, looking out over the plain, down along the Billabong, and up through the mulga branches at the stars; then he comforted the pup a bit, shoved the fire together with his toe, stood the tea-billy on the coals, and came and squatted on the sand by my head.

"Joe! I'll tell you a yarn."

"All right; fire away! Has it got anything to do with the Lachlan?"

"No. It's got nothing to do with the Lachlan now; but it's about a chap he knew. Don't you ever breathe a word of this to the Lachlan or any one, or he'll get on to me."

"All right. Go ahead."

"You know I've been a good many things in my time. I did a deal of house-painting at one time; I was a pretty smart brush hand, and made money at it. Well, I had a run of work at a place called Redclay, on the Lachlan side. You know the sort of town—two pubs, a general store, a post-office, a blacksmith's shop, a police station, a branch bank, and a dozen private weatherboard boxes on piles, with galvanised-iron tops, besides the humpies. There was a paper there, too, called the *Redclay Advertiser* (with which was incorporated the *Geebung Chronicle*), and a Roman Catholic Church, a Church of England, and a Wesleyan chapel. Now, you see more of private life in the house-painting line than in any other—bar plumbing and gasfitting; but I'll tell you about my house-painting experiences some other time.

"There was a young chap named Jack Drew editing the *Advertiser* then. He belonged to the district, but had been sent to Sydney to a grammar-school when he was a boy. He was between twenty-five and thirty; had knocked round a good deal, and gone the pace in Sydney. He got on as a boy reporter on one of the big dailies; he had brains, and could write rings round a good many, but he got in with a crowd that called themselves 'Bohemians,' and the drink got a hold on him. The paper stuck to him as long as it could (for the sake of his brains), but they had to sack him at last.

"He went out back, as most of them do, to try and work out their salvation, and knocked round amongst the sheds. He 'picked-up' in one shed where I was shearing, and we carried swags together for a couple of months. Then he went back to the Lachlan side, and prospected amongst the old fields round there with his elder brother Tom, who was all there was left of his family. Tom, by the way, broke his heart digging Jack out of a cave in a drive they were working, and died a few minutes after the rescue.[1] But that's another yarn. Jack Drew had a bad spree after that; then he went to Sydney again, got on his old paper, went to the dogs, and a Parliamentary push that owned some city fly-blisters and country papers sent him up to edit the *Advertiser* at two quid a week. He drank again, and no wonder—you don't know what it is to run a *Geebung Advocate* or *Mudgee Budgee Chronicle*, and live there. He was about the same build as the Lachlan, but stouter, and had something the same kind of eyes; but he was ordinarily as careless and devil-may-care as the Lachlan is grumpy and quiet.

"There was a doctor there, called Dr. Lebinski. They said he was a Polish exile. He was fifty or sixty, a tall man, with the set of an old soldier when he stood straight; but he mostly walked with his hands behind him, studying the ground. Jack Drew caught that trick off him towards the end.

[1] See "When the Sun Went Down," in "While the Billy Boils."

They were chums in a gloomy way, and kept to themselves—they were the only two men with brains in that town. They drank and fought the drink together. The Doctor was too gloomy and impatient over little things to be popular. Jack Drew talked too straight in the paper, and in spite of his proprietors, about pub spieling and such things—and was too sarcastic in his progress committee, town council, and toady reception reports. The Doctor had a hawk's nose, pointed grizzled beard and moustache, and steely-grey eyes with a haunted look in them sometimes (especially when he glanced at you sideways), as if he loathed his fellow-men, and couldn't always hide it; or as if you were the spirit of morphia or opium, or a dead girl he'd wronged in his youth—or whatever his devil was, beside drink. He was clever, and drink had brought him down to Redclay.

"The bank manager was a heavy snob named Browne. He complained of being a bit dull of hearing in one ear—after you'd yelled at him three or four times; sometimes I've thought he was as deaf as a book-keeper in both. He had a wife and youngsters, but they were away on a visit while I was working in Redclay. His niece—or, rather, his wife's niece—a girl named Ruth Wilson, did the housekeeping. She was an orphan, adopted by her aunt, and was general slavey and scapegoat to the family—especially to the brats, as is often the case. She was rather pretty, and ladylike, and kept to

herself. The women and girls called her Miss Wilson, and didn't like her. Most of the single men—and some of the married ones, perhaps—were gone on her, but hadn't the brains or the pluck to bear up and try their luck. I was gone worse than any, I think, but had too much experience or common sense. She was very good to me—used to hand me out cups of tea and plates of sandwiches, or bread and butter, or cake, mornings and afternoons the whole time I was painting the bank. The Doctor had known her people, and was very kind to her. She was about the only woman—for she was more woman than girl—that he'd brighten up and talk for. Neither he nor Jack Drew were particularly friendly with Browne or his push.

"The banker, the storekeeper, one of the publicans, the butcher (a popular man with his hands in his pockets, his hat on the back of his head, and nothing in it), the postmaster, and his toady, the lightning squirter, were the scrub-aristocracy. The rest were crawlers, mostly pub spielers and bush larrikins, and the women were hags and larrikinesses. The town lived on cheque-men from the surrounding bush. It was a nice little place, taking it all round.

"I remember a ball at the local town hall, where the scrub-aristocrats took one end of the room to dance in and the ordinary scum the other. It was a saving in music. Some day an Australian writer will come along who'll remind the critics and

readers of Dickens, Carlyle, and Thackeray mixed, and he'll do justice to these little customs of ours in the little settled-district towns of Democratic Australia. This sort of thing came to a head one New Year's Night at Redclay, when there was a 'public' ball and peace on earth and goodwill towards all men—mostly on account of a railway to Redclay being surveyed. We were all there. They'd got the Doc. out of his shell to act as M.C.

"One of the aristocrats was the daughter of the local storekeeper; she belonged to the lawn-tennis clique, and they *were* select. For some reason or other—because she looked upon Miss Wilson as a slavey, or on account of a fancied slight, or the heat working on ignorance, or on account of something that comes over girls and women that no son of sin can account for—this Miss Tea-'n'-sugar tossed her head and refused Miss Wilson's hand in the first set, and so broke the ladies' chain and the dance. Then there was a to-do. The Doctor held up his hand to stop the music, and said, very quietly, that he must call upon Miss So-and-so to apologise to Miss Wilson—or resign the chair. After a lot of fuss the girl did apologise in a snappy way that was another insult. Jack Drew gave Miss Wilson his arm and marched her off without a word—I saw she was almost crying. Some one said, 'Oh, let's go on with the dance.' The Doctor flashed round on them, but they were too paltry for him, so he turned on his heel and went out without a word. But I

was beneath them again in social standing, so there was nothing to prevent me from making a few well-chosen remarks on things in general—which I did; and broke up that ball, and broke some heads afterwards, and got myself a good deal of hatred and respect, and two sweethearts; and lost all the jobs I was likely to get, except at the bank, the Doctor's, and the Royal.

"One day it was raining—general rain for a week. Rain, rain, rain, over ridge and scrub and galvanised iron, and into the dismal creeks. I'd done all my inside work, except a bit under the Doctor's verandah, where he'd been having some patching and altering done round the glass doors of his surgery, where he consulted his patients. I didn't want to lose time. It was a Monday and no day for the Royal, and there was no dust, so it was a good day for varnishing. I took a pot and brush and went along to give the Doctor's doors a coat of varnish. The Doctor and Drew were inside with a fire, drinking whisky and smoking, but I didn't know that when I started work. The rain roared on the iron roof like the sea. All of a sudden it held up for a minute, and I heard their voices. The Doctor had been shouting on account of the rain, and forgot to lower his voice. 'Look here, Jack Drew,' he said, 'there are only two things for you to do if you have any regard for that girl; one is to stop this' (the liquor I suppose he meant) 'and pull yourself together; and I don't think you'll do

that—I know men. The other is to throw up the *Advertiser*—it's doing you no good—and clear out.' 'I won't do that,' says Drew. 'Then shoot yourself,' said the Doctor. '(There's another flask in the cupboard.) You know what this hole is like. . . . She's a good true girl—a girl as God made her. I knew her father and mother, and I tell you, Jack, I'd sooner see her dead than . . .' The roof roared again. I felt a bit delicate about the business and didn't like to disturb them, so I knocked off for the day.

"About a week before that I was down in the bed of the Redclay Creek fishing for 'tailers.' I'd been getting on all right with the housemaid at the 'Royal'—she used to have plates of pudding and hot pie for me on the big gridiron arrangement over the kitchen range; and after the third tuck-out I thought it was good enough to do a bit of a bear-up in that direction. She mentioned one day, yarning, that she liked a stroll by the creek sometimes in the cool of the evening. I thought she'd be off that day, so I said I'd go for a fish after I'd knocked off. I thought I might get a bite. Anyway, I didn't catch Lizzie—tell you about that some other time.

"It was Sunday. I'd been fishing for Lizzie about an hour, when I saw a skirt on the bank out of the tail of my eye—and thought I'd got a bite, sure. But I was had. It was Miss Wilson strolling along the bank in the sunset, all by her pretty self. She

was a slight girl, not very tall, with reddish frizzled hair, grey eyes, and small, pretty features. She spoke as if she had more brains than the average, and had been better educated. Jack Drew was the only young man in Redclay she could talk to, or who could talk to a girl like her; and that was the whole trouble in a nutshell. The newspaper office was next to the bank, and I'd seen her hand cups of tea and cocoa over the fence to his office window more than once, and sometimes they yarned for awhile.

"She said, 'Good morning, Mr. Mitchell.'

"I said, 'Good morning, Miss.'

"There's some girls I can't talk to like I'd talk to other girls. She asked me if I'd caught any fish, and I said, 'No, Miss.' She asked me if it wasn't me down there fishing with Mr. Drew the other evening, and I said, 'Yes—it was me.' Then presently she asked me straight if he was fishing down the creek that afternoon? I guessed they'd been down fishing for each other before. I said, 'No, I thought he was out of town.' I knew he was pretty bad at the Royal. I asked her if she'd like to have a try with my line, but she said No, thanks, she must be going; and she went off up the creek. I reckoned Jack Drew had got a bite and landed her. I felt a bit sorry for her, too.

"The next Saturday evening after the rainy Monday at the Doctor's, I went down to fish for tailers —and Lizzie. I went down under the banks to

where there was a big she-oak stump half in the water, going quietly, with an idea of not frightening the fish. I was just unwinding the line from my rod, when I noticed the end of another rod sticking out from the other side of the stump; and while I watched it was dropped into the water. Then I heard a murmur, and craned my neck round the back of the stump to see who it was. I saw the back view of Jack Drew and Miss Wilson; he had his arm round her waist, and her head was on his shoulder. She said, 'I *will* trust you, Jack—I know you'll give up the drink for my sake. And I'll help you, and we'll be so happy!' or words in that direction. A thunderstorm was coming on. The sky had darkened up with a great blue-black storm-cloud rushing over, and they hadn't noticed it. I didn't mind, and the fish bit best in a storm. But just as she said 'happy' came a blinding flash and a crash that shook the ridges, and the first drops came peltering down. They jumped up and climbed the bank, while I perched on the she-oak roots over the water to be out of sight as they passed. Half-way to the town I saw them standing in the shelter of an old stone chimney that stood alone. He had his overcoat round her and was sheltering her from the wind. . . ."

"Smoke-oh, Joe. The tea's stewing."

Mitchell got up, stretched himself, and brought the billy and pint-pots to the head of my camp. The moon had grown misty. The plain horizon

had closed in. A couple of boughs, hanging from the gnarled and blasted timber over the Billabong, were the perfect shapes of two men hanging side by side. Mitchell scratched the back of his neck and looked down at the pup curled like a glob of mud on the sand in the moonlight, and an idea struck him. He got a big old felt hat he had, lifted his pup, nose to tail, fitted it in the hat, shook it down, holding the hat by the brim, and stood the hat near the head of his doss, out of the moonlight. "He might get moonstruck," said Mitchell, "and I don't want that pup to be a genius." The pup seemed perfectly satisfied with this new arrangement.

"Have a smoke," said Mitchell. "You see," he added, with a sly grin, "I've got to make up the yarn as I go along, and it's hard work. It seems to begin to remind me of yarns your grandmother or aunt tells of things that happened when she was a girl—but those yarns are true. You won't have to listen long now; I'm well on into the second volume.

"After the storm I hurried home to the tent—I was batching with a carpenter. I changed my clothes, made a fire in the fire-bucket with shavings and ends of soft wood, boiled the billy, and had a cup of coffee. It was Saturday night. My mate was at the Royal; it was cold and dismal in the tent, and there was nothing to read, so I reckoned I might as well go up to the Royal, too, and put in the time.

"I had to pass the Bank on the way. It was the usual weatherboard box with a galvanised-iron top—

four rooms and a passage, with a detached kitchen and washhouse at the back. The front room to the right was the office, behind that was the family bedroom; the front room to the left was Miss Wilson's bedroom, and behind that was the living room. The *Advertiser* office was next door. Jack Drew camped in a skillion room behind his printing-office, and had his meals at the Royal. I noticed the storm had taken a sheet of iron off the skillion, and supposed he'd sleep at the Royal that night. Next to the *Advertiser* office was the police-station and the Court-house. Next was the Imperial Hotel where the scrub-aristocrats went. There was a vacant allotment on the other side of the Bank, and I took a short cut across this to the Royal.

"They'd forgotten to pull down the blind of the dining-room window, and I happened to glance through, and saw she had Jack Drew in there and was giving him a cup of tea. He had a bad cold, I remember, and I suppose his health had got precious to her, poor girl. As I glanced, she stepped to the window and pulled down the blind, which put me out of face a bit—though, of course, she hadn't seen me. I was rather surprised at her having Jack in there, till I heard that the banker, the postmaster, the constable, and some others were making a night of it at the Imperial, as they'd been doing pretty often lately—and went on doing till there was a blow-up about it, and the constable got transferred Out Back. I used to drink my share then. We smoked and

played cards and yarned and filled 'em up again at the Royal till after one in the morning. Then I started home.

"I'd finished giving the Bank a couple of coats of stone-colour that week, and was cutting in in dark colour round the spouting, doors, and window-frames that Saturday. My head was pretty clear going home, and as I passed the place it struck me that I'd left out the only varnish brush I had. I'd been using it to give the sashes a coat of varnish colour, and remembered that I'd left it on one of the window-sills—the sill of her bedroom window, as it happened. I knew I'd sleep in next day, Sunday, and guessed it would be hot, and I didn't want the varnish tool to get spoiled; so I reckoned I'd slip in through the side gate, get it, and take it home to camp and put it in oil. The window sash was jammed, I remember, and I hadn't been able to get it up more than a couple of inches to paint the runs of the sash. The grass grew up close under the window, and I slipped in quietly. I noticed the sash was still up a couple of inches. Just as I grabbed the brush I heard low voices inside —Ruth Wilson's and Jack Drew's—in her room.

"The surprise sent about a pint of beer up into my throat in a lump. I tiptoed away out of there. Just as I got clear of the gate I saw the banker being helped home by a couple of cronies.

"I went home to the camp and turned in, but I couldn't sleep. I lay think—think—thinking, till I thought all the drink out of my head. I'd brought a

bottle of ale home to last over Sunday, and I drank that. It only made matters worse. I didn't know how I felt—I—well, I felt as if I was as good a man as Jack Drew—I—you see I've—you might think it soft—but I loved that girl, not as I've been gone on other girls, but in the old-fashioned, soft, honest, hopeless, far-away sort of way; and now, to tell the straight truth, I thought I might have had her. You lose a thing through being too straight or sentimental, or not having enough cheek; and another man comes along with more brass in his blood and less sentimental rot, and takes it up—and the world respects him, and you feel in your heart that you're a weaker man than he is. Why, part of the time I must have felt like a man does when a better man runs away with his wife. But I'd drunk a lot, and was upset and lonely-feeling that night.

"Oh, but Redclay had a tremendous sensation next day! Jack Drew, of all the men in the world, had been caught in the act of robbing the bank. According to Browne's account in court and in the newspapers, he returned home that night at about twelve o'clock (which I knew was a lie, for I saw him being helped home nearer two), and immediately retired to rest (on top of the quilt, boots and all, I suppose). Some time before daybreak he was roused by a fancied noise (I suppose it was his head swelling); he rose, turned up a night lamp (he hadn't lit it, I'll swear), and went through the dining-room passage and office to investigate (for whisky and

water). He saw that the doors and windows were secure, returned to bed, and fell asleep again.

"There is something in a deaf person's being roused easily. I know the case of a deaf chap who'd start up at a step or movement in the house when no one else could hear or feel it; keen sense of vibration, I reckon. Well, just at daybreak (to shorten the yarn) the banker woke suddenly, he said, and heard a crack like a shot in the house. There was a loose flooring-board in the passage that went off like a pistol-shot sometimes when you trod on it; and I guess Jack Drew trod on it, sneaking out, and he weighed nearly twelve stone. If the truth were known, he probably heard Browne poking round, tried the window, found the sash jammed, and was slipping through the passage to the back door. Browne got his revolver, opened his door suddenly, and caught Drew standing between the girl's door (which was shut) and the office door, with his coat on his arm and his boots in his hands. Browne covered him with his revolver, swore he'd shoot if he moved, and yelled for help. Drew stood a moment like a man stunned; then he rushed Browne, and in the struggle the revolver went off, and Drew got hit in the arm. Two of the mounted troopers—who'd been up looking to the horses for an early start somewhere—rushed in then, and took Drew. He had nothing to say. What could he say? He couldn't say he was a blackguard who'd taken advantage of a poor unprotected girl because she loved him. They found the back door unlocked,

by the way, which was put down to the burglar; of course Browne couldn't explain that he came home too muddled to lock doors after him.

"And the girl? She shrieked and fell when the row started, and they found her like a log on the floor of her room after it was over.

"They found in Jack's overcoat pocket a parcel containing a cold chisel, small screw-wrench, file, and one or two other things that he'd bought that evening to tinker up the old printing-press. I knew that, because I'd lent him a hand a few nights before, and he told me he'd have to get the tools. They found some scratches round the key-hole and knob of the office door that I'd made myself, scraping old splashes of paint off the brass and hand-plate, so as to make a clean finish. Oh, it taught me the value of circumstantial evidence! If I was judge, I wouldn't give a man till the 'risin' av the coort' on it, any more than I would on the bare word of the noblest woman breathing.

"At the preliminary examination Jack Drew said he was guilty. But it seemed that, according to law, he couldn't be guilty until after he was committed. So he was committed for trial at the next Quarter Sessions. The excitement and gabble were worse than the Dean case, or Federation, and sickened me, for they were all on the wrong track. You lose a lot of life through being behind the scenes. But they cooled down presently to wait for the trial.

"They thought it best to take the girl away from

the place where she'd got the shock; so the Doctor took her to his house, where he had an old housekeeper who was as deaf as a post — a first-class recommendation for a housekeeper anywhere. He got a nurse from Sydney to attend on Ruth Wilson, and no one except he and the nurse were allowed to go near her. She lay like dead, they said, except when she had to be held down raving; brain fever, they said, brought on by the shock of the attempted burglary and pistol shot. Dr. Lebinski had another doctor up from Sydney at his own expense, but nothing could save her—and perhaps it was as well. She might have finished her life in a lunatic asylum. They were going to send her to Sydney, to a brain hospital; but she died a week before the Sessions. She was right-headed for an hour, they said, and asking all the time for Jack. The Doctor told her he was all right and was coming—and, waiting and listening for him, she died.

"The case was black enough against Drew now. I knew he wouldn't have the pluck to tell the truth now, even if he was that sort of a man. I didn't know what to do, so I spoke to the Doctor straight. I caught him coming out of the Royal, and walked along the road with him a bit. I suppose he thought I was going to show cause why his doors ought to have another coat of varnish.

"'Hallo, Mitchell!' he said, 'how's painting?'

"'Doctor!' I said, 'what am I going to do about this business?'

"'What business?'

"'Jack Drew's.'

"He looked at me sideways—the swift, haunted look. Then he walked on without a word, for half-a-dozen yards, hands behind, and studying the dust. Then he asked, quite quietly:

"'Do you know the truth?'

"'Yes!'

"About a dozen yards this time; then he said:

"'I'll see him in the morning, and see you afterwards,' and he shook hands and went on home.

"Next day he came to me where I was doing a job on a step ladder. He leaned his elbow against the steps for a moment, and rubbed his hand over his forehead, as if it ached and he was tired.

"'I've seen him, Mitchell,' he said.

"'Yes.'

"'You were mates with him, once, Out Back?'

"'I was.'

"'You know Drew's handwriting?'

"'I should think so.'

"He laid a leaf from a pocket-book on top of the steps. I read the message written in pencil:

"*To Jack Mitchell.—We were mates on the track. If you know anything of my affair, don't give it away. —J. D.*

"I tore the leaf and dropped the bits into the paint-pot.

"'That's all right, Doctor,' I said; 'but is there no way?'

"'None.'

"He turned away, wearily. He'd knocked about so much over the world that he was past bothering about explaining things or being surprised at anything. But he seemed to get a new idea about me; he came back to the steps again, and watched my brush for awhile, as if he was thinking, in a broody sort of way, of throwing up his practice and going in for house-painting. Then he said, slowly and deliberately:

"'If she—the girl—had lived, we might have tried to fix it up quietly. That's what I was hoping for. I don't see how we can help him now, even if he'd let us. He would never have spoken, anyway. We must let it go on, and after the trial I'll go to Sydney and see what I can do at headquarters. It's too late now. You understand, Mitchell?'

"'Yes. I've thought it out.'

"Then he went away towards the Royal.

"And what could Jack Drew or we do? Study it out whatever way you like. There was only one possible chance to help him, and that was to go to the judge; and the judge that happened to be on that circuit was a man who—even if he did listen to the story and believe it—would have felt inclined to give Jack all the more for what he was charged with. Browne was out of the question. The day before the trial I went for a long walk in the bush, but couldn't hit on anything that the Doctor might have missed.

"I was in the court—I couldn't keep away. The Doctor was there too. There wasn't so much of a change in Jack as I expected, only he had the gaol white in his face already. He stood fingering the rail, as if it was the edge of a table on a platform and he was a tired and bored and sleepy chairman waiting to propose a vote of thanks."

The only well-known man in Australia who reminds me of Mitchell is Bland Holt, the comedian. Mitchell was about as good-hearted as Bland Holt, too, under it all; but he was bigger and roughened by the bush. But he seemed to be taking a heavy part to-night, for, towards the end of his yarn, he got up and walked up and down the length of my bed, dropping the sentences as he turned towards me. He'd folded his arms high and tight, and his face in the moonlight was—well, it was very different from his careless tone of voice. He was like—like an actor acting tragedy and talking comedy. Mitchell went on, speaking quickly—his voice seeming to harden:

. . . . . .

"The charge was read out—I forget how it went—it sounded like a long hymn being given out. Jack pleaded guilty. Then he straightened up for the first time and looked round the court, with a calm, disinterested look—as if we were all strangers, and he was noting the size of the meeting. And—it's a funny world, ain't it?—every one of us shifted or dropped his eyes, just as if we were the felons

and Jack the judge. Every one except the Doctor; he looked at Jack and Jack looked at him. Then the Doctor smiled—I can't describe it—and Drew smiled back. It struck me afterwards that I should have been in that smile. Then the Doctor did what looked like a strange thing—stood like a soldier with his hands to Attention. I'd noticed that, whenever he'd made up his mind to do a thing, he dropped his hands to his sides: it was a sign that he couldn't be moved. Now he slowly lifted his hand to his forehead, palm out, saluted the prisoner, turned on his heel, and marched from the court-room. 'He's boozin' again,' some one whispered. 'He's got a touch of 'em.' 'My oath, he's ratty!' said some one else. One of the traps said:

"'Arder in the car-rt!'

"The judge gave it to Drew red-hot on account of the burglary being the cause of the girl's death and the sorrow in a respectable family; then he gave him five years' hard.

"It gave me a lot of confidence in myself to see the law of the land barking up the wrong tree, while only I and the Doctor and the prisoner knew it. But I've found out since then that the law is often the only one that knows it's barking up the wrong tree."

. . . . . .

Mitchell prepared to turn in.

"And what about Drew?" I asked.

"Oh, he did his time, or most of it. The Doctor

went to headquarters, but either a drunken doctor from a geebung town wasn't of much account, or they weren't taking any romance just then at headquarters. So the Doctor came back, drank heavily, and one frosty morning they found him on his back on the bank of the creek, with his face like note-paper where the blood hadn't dried on it, and an old pistol in his hand—that he'd used, they said, to shoot Cossacks from horseback when he was a young dude fighting in the bush in Poland."

Mitchell lay silent a good while; then he yawned.

"Ah, well! It's a lonely track the Lachlan's tramping to-night; but I s'pose he's got his ghosts with him."

I'd been puzzling for the last half-hour to think where I'd met or heard of Jack Drew; now it flashed on me that I'd been told that Jack Drew was the Lachlan's real name.

I lay awake thinking a long time, and wished Mitchell had kept his yarn for daytime. I felt—well, I felt as if the Lachlan's story should have been played in the biggest theatre in the world, by the greatest actors, with music for the intervals and situations—deep, strong music, such as thrills and lifts a man from his boot soles. And when I got to sleep I hadn't slept a moment, it seemed to me, when I started wide awake to see those infernal hanging boughs with a sort of nightmare idea that

the Lachlan hadn't gone, or had come back, and he and Mitchell had hanged themselves sociably—Mitchell for sympathy and the sake of mateship.

But Mitchell was sleeping peacefully, in spite of a path of moonlight across his face—and so was the pup.

THE DARLING RIVER

THE Darling—which is either a muddy gutter or a second Mississippi—is about six times as long as the distance, in a straight line, from its head to its mouth. The state of the river is vaguely but generally understood to depend on some distant and foreign phenomena to which bushmen refer in an off-hand tone of voice as "the Queenslan' rains," which seem to be held responsible, in a general way, for most of the out-back trouble.

It takes less than a year to go up stream by boat to Walgett or Bourke in a dry season; but after the first three months the passengers generally go ashore and walk. They get sick of being stuck in the same sort of place, in the same old way; they grow weary of seeing the same old "whaler" drop his swag on the bank opposite whenever the boat ties up for wood; they get tired of lending him tobacco, and listening to his ideas, which are limited in number and narrow in conception.

It shortens the journey to get out and walk; but then you will have to wait so long for your luggage —unless you hump it with you.

We heard of a man who determined to stick to a Darling boat and travel the whole length of the

river. He was a newspaper man. He started on his voyage of discovery one Easter in flood-time, and a month later the captain got bushed between the Darling and South Australian border. The waters went away before he could find the river again, and left his boat in a scrub. They had a cargo of rations, and the crew stuck to the craft while the tucker lasted; when it gave out they rolled up their swags and went to look for a station, but didn't find one. The captain would study his watch and the sun, rig up dials and make out courses, and follow them without success. They ran short of water, and didn't smell any for weeks; they suffered terrible privations, and lost three of their number, *not* including the newspaper liar. There are even dark hints considering the drawing of lots in connection with something too terrible to mention. They crossed a thirty-mile plain at last, and sighted a black gin. She led them to a boundary rider's hut, where they were taken in and provided with rations and rum.

Later on a syndicate was formed to explore the country and recover the boat; but they found her thirty miles from the river and about eighteen from the nearest waterhole deep enough to float her, so they left her there. She's there still, or else the man that told us about it is the greatest liar Out Back.

. . . . . .

Imagine the hull of a North Shore ferry boat, blunted a little at the ends and cut off about a foot below the water-line, and parallel to it, then you will have something shaped somewhat like the hull of a Darling mud-rooter. But the river boat is much stronger. The boat we were on was built and repaired above deck after the different ideas of many bush carpenters, of whom the last seemed by his work to have regarded the original plan with a contempt only equalled by his disgust at the work of the last carpenter but one. The wheel was boxed in, mostly with round sapling-sticks fastened to the frame with bunches of nails and spikes of all shapes and sizes, most of them bent. The general result was decidedly picturesque in its irregularity, but dangerous to the mental welfare of any passenger who was foolish enough to try to comprehend the design; for it seemed as though every carpenter had taken the opportunity to work in a little abstract idea of his own.

The way they "dock" a Darling River boat is beautiful for its simplicity. They choose a place where there are two stout trees about the boat's length apart, and standing on a line parallel to the river. They fix pulley-blocks to the trees, lay sliding planks down into the water, fasten a rope to one end of the steamer, and take the other end through the block attached to the tree and thence back aboard a second steamer; then they carry a rope similarly from the other end through the

block on the second tree, and aboard a third boat. At a given signal one boat leaves for Wentworth, and the other starts for the Queensland border. The consequence is that craft number one climbs the bank amid the cheers of the local loafers, who congregate and watch the proceedings with great interest and approval. The crew pitch tents, and set to work on the hull, which looks like a big, rough shallow box.

. . . . . .

We once travelled on the Darling for a hundred miles or so on a boat called the *Mud Turtle*—at least, that's what *we* called her. She might reasonably have haunted the Mississippi fifty years ago. She didn't seem particular where she went, or whether she started again or stopped for good after getting stuck. Her machinery sounded like a chapter of accidents and was always out of order, but she got along all the same, provided the steersman kept her off the bank.

Her skipper was a young man, who looked more like a drover than a sailor, and the crew bore a greater resemblance to the unemployed than to any other body we know of, except that they looked a little more independent. They seemed clannish, too, with an unemployed or free-labour sort of isolation. We have an idea that they regarded our personal appearance with contempt.

. . . . . .

Above Louth we picked up a "whaler," who came aboard for the sake of society and tobacco. Not that he hoped to shorten his journey; he had no destination. He told us many reckless and unprincipled lies, and gave us a few ornamental facts. One of them took our fancy, and impressed us—with its beautiful simplicity, I suppose. He said: "Some miles above where the Darlin' and the Warrygo runs inter each other, there's a billygong runnin' right across between the two rivers and makin' a sort of tryhangular hyland; 'n' I can tel'yer a funny thing about it." Here he paused to light his pipe. "Now," he continued impressively, jerking the match overboard, "when the Darlin's up, and the Warrygo's *low*, the billygong runs from the Darlin' into the *Warrygo; and*, when the Warrygo's up 'n' the Darlin's down, the waters runs *from* the Warrygo 'n' inter the Darlin'."

What could be more simple?

The steamer was engaged to go up a billabong for a load of shearers from a shed which was cutting out; and first it was necessary to tie up in the river and discharge the greater portion of the cargo in order that the boat might safely negotiate the shallow waters. A local fisherman, who volunteered to act as pilot, was taken aboard, and after he was outside about a pint of whisky he seemed to have the greatest confidence in his ability to take us to hell, or anywhere else—at least, he said so. A man was sent ashore with

blankets and tucker to mind the wool, and we crossed the river, butted into the anabranch, and started out back. Only the Lord and the pilot know how we got there. We travelled over the bush, through its branches sometimes, and sometimes through grass and mud, and every now and then we struck something that felt and sounded like a collision. The boat slid down one hill, and "fetched" a stump at the bottom with a force that made every mother's son bite his tongue or break a tooth.

The shearers came aboard next morning, with their swags and two cartloads of boiled mutton, bread, "brownie," and tea and sugar. They numbered about fifty, including the rouseabouts. This load of sin sank the steamer deeper into the mud; but the passengers crowded over to port, by request of the captain, and the crew poked the bank away with long poles. When we began to move the shearers gave a howl like the yell of a legion of lost souls escaping from down below. They gave three cheers for the rouseabouts' cook, who stayed behind; then they cursed the station with a mighty curse. They cleared a space on deck, had a jig, and afterwards a fight between the shearers' cook and his assistant. They gave a mighty bush whoop for the Darling when the boat swung into that grand old gutter, and in the evening they had a general all-round time. We got back, and the crew had to reload the wool without assistance,

for it bore the accursed brand of a "freedom-of-contract" shed.

We slept, or tried to sleep, that night on the ridge of two wool bales laid with the narrow sides up, having first been obliged to get ashore and fight six rounds with a shearer for the privilege of roosting there. The live cinders from the fire-box went up the chimney all night, and fell in showers on deck. Every now and again a spark would burn through the "Wagga rug" of a sleeping shearer, and he'd wake suddenly and get up and curse. It was no use shifting round, for the wind was all ways, and the boat steered north, south, east, and west to humour the river. Occasionally a low branch would root three or four passengers off their wool bales, and they'd get up and curse in chorus. The boat started two snags; and towards daylight struck a stump. The accent was on the stump. A wool bale went overboard, and took a swag and a dog with it; then the owner of the swag and dog and the crew of the boat had a swearing match between them. The swagman won.

About daylight we stretched our cramped limbs, extricated one leg from between the wool bales, and found that the steamer was just crayfishing away from a mud island, where she had tied up for more wool. Some of the chaps had been ashore and boiled four or five buckets of tea and coffee. Shortly after the boat had settled down to work

again an incident came along. A rouseabout rose late, and, while the others were at breakfast, got an idea into his head that a good "sloosh" would freshen him up; so he mooched round until he found a big wooden bucket with a rope to it. He carried the bucket aft of the wheel. The boat was butting up stream for all she was worth, and the stream was running the other way, of course, and about a hundred times as fast as a train. The jackeroo gave the line a turn round his wrist; before any one could see him in time to suppress him, he lifted the bucket, swung it to and fro, and dropped it cleverly into the water.

This delayed us for nearly an hour. A couple of men jumped into the row boat immediately and cast her adrift. They picked up the jackeroo about a mile down the river, clinging to a snag, and when we hauled him aboard he looked like something the cat had dragged in, only bigger. We revived him with rum, and got him on his feet; and then, when the captain and crew had done cursing him, he rubbed his head, went forward, and had a look at the paddle; then he rubbed his head again, thought, and remarked to his mates:

"Wasn't it lucky I didn't dip that bucket *for'ard* the wheel?"

This remark struck us forcibly. We agreed that it was lucky—for him; but the captain remarked that it was damned unlucky for the world, which, he explained, was over-populated with fools already.

Getting on towards afternoon we found a barge loaded with wool and tied up to a tree in the wilderness. There was no sign of a man to be seen, nor any sign, except the barge, that a human being had ever been there. The captain took the craft in tow, towed it about ten miles up the stream, and left it in a less likely place than where it was before.

Floating bottles began to be more frequent, and we knew by that same token that we were nearing "Here's Luck!"—Bourke, we mean. And this reminds us.

When the Brewarrina people observe a more than ordinary number of bottles floating down the river, they guess that Walgett is on the spree; when the Louth chaps see an unbroken procession of dead marines for three or four days they know that Bourke's drunk. The poor, God-abandoned "whaler" sits in his hungry camp at sunset and watches the empty symbols of Hope go by, and feels more God-forgotten than ever—and thirstier, if possible—and gets a great, wide, thirsty, quaking, empty longing to be up where those bottles come from. If the townspeople knew how much misery they caused by their thoughtlessness they would drown their dead marines, or bury them, but on no account allow them to go drifting down the river, and stirring up hells in the bosoms of less fortunate fellow-creatures.

There came a man from Adelaide to Bourke once, and he collected all the empty bottles in town, stacked them by the river, and waited for a boat.

What he wanted them for the legend sayeth not, but the people reckoned he had a "private still," or something of that sort, somewhere down the river, and were satisfied. What he came from Adelaide for, or whether he really did come from there, we do not know. All the Darling bunyips are supposed to come from Adelaide. Anyway, the man collected all the empty bottles he could lay his hands on, and piled them on the bank, where they made a good show. He waited for a boat to take his cargo, and, while waiting, he got drunk. That excited no comment. He stayed drunk for three weeks, but the townspeople saw nothing unusual in that. In order to become an object of interest in their eyes, and in that line, he would have had to stay drunk for a year and fight three times a day—oftener, if possible—and lie in the road in the broiling heat between whiles, and be walked on by camels and Afghans and free-labourers, and be locked up every time he got sober enough to smash a policeman, and try to hang himself naked, and be finally squashed by a loaded wool team.

But while he drank the Darling rose, for reasons best known to itself, and floated those bottles off. They strung out and started for the Antarctic Ocean, with a big old wicker-worked demijohn in the lead.

For the first week the down-river men took no notice; but after the bottles had been drifting past with scarcely a break for a fortnight or so, they began to get interested. Several whalers watched the pro-

cession until they got the jimjams by force of imagination, and when their bodies began to float down with the bottles, the down-river people got anxious.

At last the Mayor of Wilcannia wired Bourke to know whether Dibbs or Parkes was dead, or democracy triumphant, or if not, wherefore the jubilation? Many telegrams of a like nature were received during that week, and the true explanation was sent in reply to each. But it wasn't believed, and to this day Bourke has the name of being the most drunken town on the river.

After dinner a humorous old hard case mysteriously took us aside and said he had a good yarn which we might be able to work up. We asked him how, but he winked a mighty cunning wink and said that he knew all about us. Then he asked us to listen. He said:

"There was an old feller down the Murrumbidgee named Kelly. He was a bit gone here. One day Kelly was out lookin' for some sheep, when he got lost. It was gettin' dark. Bymeby there came an old crow in a tree overhead.

"'Kel-ley, you're lo-o-st! Kel-ley, you're lo-o-st!' sez the crow.

"'I know I am,' sez Kelly.

"'Fol-ler me, fol-ler me,' sez the crow.

"'Right y'are,' sez Kelly, with a jerk of his arm. 'Go ahead.'

"So the crow went on, and Kelly follered, an' bymeby he found he was on the right track.

"Some time after Kelly was washin' sheep (this was when we useter wash the sheep instead of the wool). Kelly was standin' on the platform with a crutch in his hand landin' the sheep, when there came a old crow in the tree overhead.

"'Kelly, I'm hun-gry! Kel-ley, I'm hun-ger-ry!' sez the crow.

"'Alright,' sez Kelly; 'be up at the hut about dinner-time 'n' I'll sling you out something.'

"'Drown — a — sheep! Drown — a — sheep, Kel-ley,' sez the crow.

"'Blanked if I do,' sez Kelly. 'If I drown a sheep I'll have to pay for it, be-God!'

"'Then I won't find yer when yer lost agin,' sez the crow.

"'I'm damned if yer will,' says Kelly. 'I'll take blanky good care I won't get lost again, to be found by a gory ole crow.'"

. . . . . .

There are a good many fishermen on the Darling. They camp along the banks in all sorts of tents, and move about in little box boats that will only float one man. The fisherman is never heavy. He is mostly a withered little old madman, with black claws, dirty rags (which he never changes), unkempt hair and beard, and a "ratty" expression. We cannot say that we ever saw him catch a fish, or even get a bite, and we certainly never saw him offer any for sale.

He gets a dozen or so lines out into the stream,

with the shore end fastened to pegs or roots on the bank, and passed over sticks about four feet high, stuck in the mud; on the top of these sticks he hangs bullock bells, or substitutes—jam tins with stones fastened inside to bits of string. Then he sits down and waits. If the cod pulls the line the bell rings.

The fisherman is a great authority on the river and fish, but has usually forgotten everything else, including his name. He chops firewood for the boats sometimes, but it isn't his profession—he's a fisherman. He is only sane on points concerning the river, though he has all the fisherman's eccentricities. Of course he is a liar.

When he gets his camp fixed on one bank it strikes him he ought to be over on the other, or at a place up round the bend, so he shifts. Then he reckons he was a fool for not stopping where he was before. He never dies. He never gets older, or drier, or more withered-looking, or dirtier, or loonier — because he can't. We cannot imagine him as ever having been a boy, or even a youth. We cannot even try to imagine him as a baby. He is an animated mummy, who used to fish on the Nile three thousand years ago, and catch nothing.

. . . . . .

We forgot to mention that there are wonderfully few wrecks on the Darling. The river boats seldom go down—their hulls are not built that way— and

if one did go down it wouldn't sink far. But, once down, a boat is scarcely ever raised again; because, you see, the mud silts up round it and over it, and glues it, as it were, to the bottom of the river. Then the forty-foot alligators—which come down with the "Queenslan' rains," we suppose—root in the mud and fill their bellies with sodden flour and drowned deck-hands.

They tried once to blow up a wreck with dynamite, because it (the wreck) obstructed navigation; but they blew the bottom out of the river instead, and all the water went through. The Government have been boring for it ever since. I saw some of the bores myself—there is one at Coonamble.

There is a yarn along the Darling about a cute Yankee who was invited up to Bourke to report on a proposed scheme for locking the river. He arrived towards the end of a long and severe drought, and was met at the railway station by a deputation of representative bushmen, who invited him, in the first place, to accompany them to the principal pub —which he did. He had been observed to study the scenery a good deal while coming up in the train, but kept his conclusions to himself. On the way to the pub he had a look at the town, and it was noticed that he tilted his hat forward very often, and scratched the back of his head a good deal, and pondered a lot; but he refrained from expressing an opinion—even when invited to do so. He

guessed that his opinions wouldn't do much good, anyway, and he calculated that they would keep till he got back "over our way"—by which it was reckoned he meant the States.

When they asked him what he'd have, he said to Watty the publican:

"Wal, I reckon you can build me your national drink. I guess I'll try it."

A long colonial was drawn for him, and he tried it. He seemed rather startled at first, then he looked curiously at the half-empty glass, set it down very softly on the bar, and leaned against the same and fell into a reverie; from which he roused himself after a while, with a sorrowful jerk of his head.

"Ah, well," he said. "Show me this river of yourn."

They led him to the Darling, and he had a look at it.

"Is this your river?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied apprehensively.

He tilted his hat forward till the brim nearly touched his nose, scratched the back of his long neck, shut one eye, and looked at the river with the other. Then, after spitting half a pint of tobacco juice into the stream, he turned sadly on his heel and led the way back to the pub. He invited the boys to "pisen themselves"; after they were served he ordered out the longest tumbler on the premises, poured a drop into it from nearly

every bottle on the shelf, added a lump of ice, and drank slowly and steadily.

Then he took pity on the impatient and anxious population, opened his mouth, and spake.

"Look here, fellows," he drawled, jerking his arm in the direction of the river, "I'll tell you what I'll dew. I'll bottle that damned river of yourn in twenty-four hours!"

Later on he mellowed a bit, under the influence of several drinks which were carefully and conscientiously "built" from plans and specifications supplied by himself, and then, among other things, he said:

"If that there river rises as high as you say it dew—and if this was the States—why, we'd have had the *Great Eastern* up here twenty years ago" —or words to that effect.

Then he added reflectively:

"When I come over here I calculated that I was going to make things hum, but now I guess I'll have to change my prospectus. There's a lot of loose energy laying round over our way, but I guess that if I wanted to make things move in your country I'd have to bring over the entire American nation—also his wife and dawg. You've got the makings of a glorious nation over here, but you don't get up early enough!"

. . . . . .

The only national work performed by the blacks is on the Darling. They threw a dam of rocks

across the river—near Brewarrina, we think—to make a fish trap. It's there yet. But God only knows where they got the stones from, or how they carried them, for there isn't a pebble within forty miles.

A DAUGHTER OF MAORILAND

A SKETCH OF POOR-CLASS MAORIS

THE new native-school teacher, who was "green," "soft," and poetical, and had a literary ambition, called her "August," and fondly hoped to build a romance on her character. She was down in the school registers as Sarah Moses, Maori, sixteen years and three months. She looked twenty; but this was nothing, insomuch as the mother of the youngest child in the school—a dear little half-caste lady of two or three summers—had not herself the vaguest idea of the child's age, nor anybody else's, nor of ages in the abstract. The church register was lost some six years before, when "Granny," who was a hundred, if a day, was supposed to be about twenty-five. The teacher had to guess the ages of all the new pupils.

August was apparently the oldest in the school—a big, ungainly, awkward girl, with a heavy negro type of Maori countenance, and about as much animation, mentally or physically, as a cow. She was given to brooding; in fact, she brooded all the time. She brooded all day over her school work, but did it fairly well. How the previous teachers

had taught her all she knew was a mystery to the new one. There had been a tragedy in August's family when she was a child, and the affair seemed to have cast a gloom over the lives of the entire family, for the lowering, brooding cloud was on all their faces. August would take to the bush when things went wrong at home, and climb a tree and brood till she was found and coaxed home. Things, according to pa-gossip, had gone wrong with her from the date of the tragedy, when she, a bright little girl, was taken—a homeless orphan—to live with a sister, and, afterwards, with an aunt-by-marriage. They treated her, 'twas said, with a brutality which must have been greatly exaggerated by pa-gossip, seeing that unkindness of this description is, according to all the best authorities, altogether foreign to Maori nature.

Pa-gossip—which is less reliable than the ordinary washerwoman kind, because of a deeper and more vicious ignorance—had it that one time when August was punished by a teacher (or beaten by her sister or aunt-by-marriage) she "took to the bush" for three days, at the expiration of which time she was found on the ground in an exhausted condition. She was evidently a true Maori or savage, and this was one of the reasons why the teacher with the literary ambition took an interest in her. She had a print of a portrait of a man in soldier's uniform, taken from a copy of the *Illustrated London News*, pasted over the fireplace in the whare where she

lived, and neatly bordered by vandyked strips of silvered tea-paper. She had pasted it in the place of honour, or as near as she could get to it. The place of honour was sacred to framed representations of the Nativity and Catholic subjects, half-modelled, half-pictured. The print was a portrait of the last Czar of Russia, of all the men in the world; and August was reported to have said that she loved that man. His father had been murdered, so had her mother. This was one of the reasons why the teacher with the literary ambition thought he could get a romance out of her.

After the first week she hung round the new schoolmistress, dog-like—with "dog-like affection," thought the teacher. She came down often during the holidays, and hung about the verandah and back door for an hour or so; then, by-and-by, she'd be gone. Her brooding seemed less aggressive on such occasions. The teacher reckoned that she had something on her mind, and wanted to open her heart to "the wife," but was too ignorant or too shy, poor girl; and he reckoned, from his theory of Maori character, that it might take her weeks, or months, to come to the point. One day, after a great deal of encouragement, she explained that she felt "so awfully lonely, Mrs. Lorrens." All the other girls were away, and she wished it was school-time.

She was happy and cheerful again, in her brooding way, in the playground. There was something sadly ludicrous about her great, ungainly figure

slopping round above the children at play. The schoolmistress took her into the parlour, gave her tea and cake, and was kind to her; and she took it all with broody cheerfulness.

One Sunday morning she came down to the cottage and sat on the edge of the verandah, looking as wretchedly miserable as a girl could. She was in rags—at least, she had a rag of dress on—and was barefooted and bareheaded. She said that her aunt had turned her out, and she was going to walk down the coast to Whale Bay to her grandmother—a long day's ride. The teacher was troubled, because he was undecided what to do. He had to be careful to avoid any unpleasantness arising out of Maori cliquism. As the teacher he couldn't let her go in the state she was in; from the depths of his greenness he trusted her, from the depths of his softness he pitied her; his poetic nature was fiercely indignant on account of the poor girl's wrongs, and the wife spoke for her. Then he thought of his unwritten romance, and regarded August in the light of copy, and that settled it. While he talked the matter over with his wife, August "hid in the dark of her hair," awaiting her doom. The teacher put his hat on, walked up to the pa, and saw her aunt. She denied that she had turned August out, but the teacher believed the girl. He explained his position, in words simplified for Maori comprehension, and the aunt and relations said they understood, and that he was "perfectly

right, Mr. Lorrens." They were very respectful. The teacher said that if August would not return home, he was willing to let her stay at the cottage until such time as her uncle, who was absent, returned, and he (the teacher) could talk the matter over with him. The relations thought that that was the very best thing that could be done, and thanked him. The aunt, two sisters, and as many of the others, including the children, as were within sight or hail at the time—most of them could not by any possible means have had the slightest connection with the business in hand—accompanied the teacher to the cottage. August took to the flax directly she caught sight of her relations, and was with difficulty induced to return. There was a lot of talk in Maori, during which the girl and her aunt shuffled and swung round at the back of each other, and each talked over her shoulder, and laughed foolishly and awkwardly once or twice; but in the end the girl was sullenly determined not to return home, so it was decided that she should stay. The schoolmistress made tea.

August brightened from the first day. She was a different girl altogether. "I never saw such a change in a girl," said the young schoolmistress, and one or two others. "I always thought she was a good girl if taken the right way; all she wanted was a change and kind treatment." But the stolid old Maori chairman of the school committee only shrugged his shoulders and said (when the school-

mistress, woman-like, pressed him for an opinion to agree with her own), "You can look at it two ways, Mrs. Lorrens." Which, by the way, was about the only expression of opinion that the teacher was ever able to get out of him on any subject.

August worked and behaved well. She was wonderfully quick in picking up English ways and housework. True, she was awkward and not over cleanly in some things, but her mistress had patience with her. Who wouldn't have? She "couldn't do enough" for her benefactress; she hung on her words and sat at her footstool of evenings in a way that gladdened the teacher's sentimental nature; she couldn't bear to see him help his wife with a hat-pin or button—August must do it. She insisted on doing her mistress's hair every night. In short, she tried in every way to show her gratitude. The teacher and his wife smiled brightly at each other behind her back, and thought how cheerful the house was since she came, and wondered what they'd do without her. It was a settled thing that they should take her back to the city with them, and have a faithful and grateful retainer all their lives, and a sort of Aunt Chloe for their children, when they had any. The teacher got yards of copy out of her for his "Maori Sketches and Characters," worked joyously at his romance, and felt great already, and was happy. She had a bed made up temporarily (until the teacher could get a spring mattress for her from town) on the floor in the

dining-room, and when she'd made her bed she'd squat on it in front of the fire and sing Maori songs in a soft voice. She'd sing the teacher and his wife, in the next room, to sleep. Then she'd get up and have a feed, but they never heard her.

Her manners at the table (for she was treated "like one of themselves" in the broadest sense of the term) were surprisingly good, considering that the adults of her people were decidedly cow-like in white society, and scoffed sea-eggs, shell-fish, and mutton-birds at home with a gallop which was not edifying. Her appetite, it was true, was painful at times to the poetic side of the teacher's nature; but he supposed that she'd been half-starved at home, poor girl, and would get over it. Anyway, the copy he'd get out of her would repay him for this and other expenses a hundredfold. Moreover, begging and borrowing had ceased with her advent, and the teacher set this down to her influence.

The first jar came when she was sent on horseback to the town for groceries, and didn't get back till late the next day. She explained that some of her relations got hold of her and made her stay, and wanted her to go into public-houses with them, but she wouldn't. She said that *she* wanted to come home. But why didn't she? The teacher let it pass, and hoped she'd gain strength of character by-and-by. He had waited up late the night before with her supper on the hob; and he and his wife had been anxious for fear something had happened

to the poor girl who was under their care. He had walked to the treacherous river-ford several times during the evening, and waited there for her. So perhaps he was tired, and that was why he didn't write next night.

The sugar-bag, the onion-basket, the potato-bag and the tea-chest began to "go down" alarmingly, and an occasional pound of candles, a pigeon, a mutton-bird (plucked and ready for Sunday's cooking), and other little trifles went also. August couldn't understand it, and the teacher believed her, for falsehood and deceit are foreign to the simple natures of the modern Maoris. There were no cats; but no score of ordinary cats could have given colour to the cat theory, had it been raised in this case. The breath of August advertised onions more than once, but no human stomach could have accounted for the quantity. She surely could not have eaten the other things raw—and she had no opportunities for private cooking, as far as the teacher and his wife could see. The other Maoris were out of the question; they were all strictly honest.

Thefts and annoyances of the above description were credited to the "swaggies" who infested the roads, and had a very bad name down that way; so the teacher loaded his gun, and told August to rouse him at once, if she heard a sound in the night. She said she would; but a heavy-weight "swaggie" could have come in and sat on her and had a smoke without waking her.

She couldn't be trusted to go a message. She'd take from three to six hours, and come back with an excuse that sounded genuine from its very simplicity. Another sister of hers lay ill in an isolated hut, alone and uncared for, except by the teacher's wife, and occasionally by a poor pa outcast, who had negro blood in her veins, and a love for a white loafer. God help her! All of which sounds strange, considering that Maoris are very kind to each other. The schoolmistress sent August one night to stay with the sick Maori woman and help her as she could, and gave her strict instructions to come to the cottage first thing in the morning, and tell her how the sick woman was. August turned up at lunch-time next day. The teacher gave her her first lecture, and said plainly that he wasn't to be taken for a fool; then he stepped aside to get cool, and when he returned, the girl was sobbing as if her heart would break, and the wife comforting her. She had been up all night, poor girl, and was thoroughly worn out. Somehow the teacher didn't feel uncomfortable about it. He went down to the whare. August had not touched a dishcloth or broom. She had slept, as she always did, like a pig all night, while her sister lay and tossed in agony; in the morning she ate everything there was to eat in the house (which, it seemed, was the Maori way of showing sympathy in sickness and trouble), after which she brooded by the fire till the children, running out of school, announced the teacher's lunch hour.

August braced up again for a little while. The master thought of the trouble they had with Ayacanora in "Westward Ho," and was comforted, and tackled his romance again. Then the schoolmistress fell sick and things went wrong. The groceries went down faster than ever, and the house got very dirty, and began to have a native smell about it. August grew fat, and lazy, and dirty, and less reliable on washing-days, or when there was anything special to do in the house. "The savage blood is strong," thought the teacher, "and she is beginning to long for her own people and free unconventional life." One morning—on a washing-day, too, as it happened—she called out, before the teacher and his wife were up, that the Maoris who supplied them with milk were away, and she had promised to go up and milk the cow and bring the milk down. The teacher gave her permission. One of the scholars usually brought the milk early. Lunch-time came and no August, no milk—strangest of all, only half the school children. The teacher put on his hat, and went up to the pa once more. He found August squatted in the midst of a circle of relations. She was entertaining them with one of a series of idealistic sketches of the teacher's domestic life, in which she showed a very vivid imagination, and exhibited an unaccountable savage sort of pessimism. Her intervals of absence had been occupied in this way from the first. The astounding slanders she had circulated concerning the teacher's private life came

back, bit by bit, to his ears for a year afterwards, and her character sketches of previous teachers, and her own relations—for she spared nobody—would have earned a white woman a long and well-merited term of imprisonment for criminal libel. She had cunningly, by straightforward and unscrupulous lying, prejudiced the principal mother and boss woman of the pa against the teacher and his wife; as a natural result of which the old lady, who, like the rest, was very ignorant and ungrateful, "turned nasty" and kept the children from school. The teacher lost his temper, so the children were rounded up and hurried down to school immediately; with them came August and her aunt, with alleged explanations and excuses, and a shell-fish. The aunt and sisters said they'd have nothing to do with August. They didn't want her and wouldn't have her. The teacher said that, under those circumstances, she'd better go and drown herself; so she went home with them.

The whole business had been a plot by her nearest relations. They got rid of the trouble and expense of keeping her, and the bother of borrowing in person, whenever in need of trifles in the grocery line. Borrowing recommenced with her dismissal; but the teacher put a full stop to it, as far as he was concerned. Then August, egged on by her aunt, sent a blackguardly letter to the teacher's wife; the sick sister, by the way, who had been nursed and supplied with food by her all along, was in it, and

said she was glad August sent the letter, and it served the schoolmistress right. The teacher went up to the pa once more; an hour later, August in person, accompanied, as usual, by a relation or two, delivered at the cottage an abject apology in writing, the composition of which would have discouraged the most enthusiastic advocate of higher education for the lower classes.

Then various petty annoyances were tried. The teacher is firmly convinced that certain animal-like sounds round the house at night were due to August's trying to find out whether his wife was as likely to be haunted as the Maoris were. He didn't dream of such a thing at the time, for he did not believe that one of them had the pluck to venture out after dark. But savage superstition must give way to savage hate. The girl's last "try-on" was to come down to the school fence, and ostentatiously sharpen a table-knife on the wires, while she scowled murderously in the direction of the schoolmistress, who was hanging out her washing. August looked, in her dark, bushy, Maori hair, a thoroughly wild savage. Her father had murdered her mother under particularly brutal circumstances, and the daughter took after her father.

The teacher called her and said: "Now, look here, my lady, the best thing you can do is to drop that nonsense at once" (she had dropped the knife in the ferns behind her), "for we're the wrong sort of people to try it on with. Now you get out of

this and tell your aunt—she's sneaking there in the flax—what I tell you, and that she'd better clear out of this quick, or I'll have a policeman out and take the whole gang into town in an hour. Now be off, and shut that gate behind you, carefully, and fasten it." She did, and went.

The worst of it was that the August romance copy was useless. Her lies were even less reliable and picturesque than the common Jones Alley hag lie. Then the teacher thought of the soft fool he'd been, and that made him wild. He looked like a fool, and was one to a great extent, but it wasn't good policy to take him for one.

Strange to say, he and others had reason to believe that August respected him, and liked him rather than otherwise; but she hated his wife, who had been kind to her, as only a savage can hate. The younger pupils told the teacher, cheerfully and confidently, that August said she'd cut Mrs. Lorrens' throat the first chance she got. Next week the aunt sent down to ask if the teacher could sell her a bar of soap, and sent the same old shilling; he was tired of seeing it stuck out in front of him, so he took it, put it in his pocket, and sent the soap. This must have discouraged them, for the borrowing industry petered out. He saw the aunt later on, and she told him, cheerfully, that August was going to live with a half-caste in a certain house in town.

Poor August! For she was only a tool after all.

Her "romance" was briefly as follows. She went, per off-hand Maori arrangement, as "housekeeper" in the hut of a labourer at a neighbouring saw-mill. She stayed three months, for a wonder; at the expiration of which time she put on her hat and explained that she was tired of stopping there, and was going home. He said, "All right, Sarah, wait a while and I'll take you home." At the door of her aunt's house he said, "Well, good-bye, Sarah," and she said, in her brooding way, "Good-bye, Jim." And that was all.

As the last apparent result of August's mischief-making, her brother or some one one evening rode up to the cottage, drunk and inclined to bluster. He was accompanied by a friend, also drunk, who came to see the fun, and was ready to use his influence on the winning side. The teacher went inside, brought out his gun, and slipped two cartridges in. "I've had enough of this," he said. "Now, then, be off, you insolent blackguards, or I'll shoot you like rabbits. Go!" and he snapped his jaw and the breech of his gun together. As they rode off, the old local hawk happened to soar close over a dead lamb in the fern at the corner of the garden, and the teacher, who had been "laying" for him a long time, let fly both barrels at him, without thinking. When he turned, there was only a cloud of dust down the track.

. . . . . .

The teacher taught that school for three years thereafter, without a hitch. But he went no more on Universal Brotherhood lines. And, for years after he had gone, his name was spoken of with great respect by the Maoris.

THE STORY OF THE ORACLE

"WE young fellows," said "Sympathy Joe" to Mitchell, after tea, in their first camp west the river—"and you and I *are* young fellows, comparatively—think we know the world. There are plenty of young chaps knocking round in this country who reckon they've been through it all before they're thirty. I've met cynics and men-o'-the-world, aged twenty-one or thereabouts, who've never been further than a trip to Sydney. They talk about 'this world' as if they'd knocked around in half-a-dozen other worlds before they came across here—and they are just as off-hand about it as older Australians are when they talk about this colony as compared with the others. They say: 'My oath!—same here.' 'I've been there.' 'My oath!—you're right.' 'Take it from me!' and all that sort of thing. They understand women, and have a contempt for 'em; and chaps that don't talk as they talk, or do as they do, or see as they see, are either soft or ratty. A good many reckon that 'life ain't blanky well worth livin';' sometimes they feel so blanky somehow that they wouldn't give a blank whether they chucked

it or not; but that sort never chuck it. It's mostly the quiet men that do that, and if they've got any complaints to make against the world, they make 'em at the head station. Why, I've known healthy, single, young fellows under twenty-five who drank to drown their troubles—some because they reckoned the world didn't understand nor appreciate 'em—as if it *could!*"

"If the world don't understand or appreciate you," said Mitchell solemnly, as he reached for a burning stick to light his pipe—"*make* it!"

"To drown *their* troubles!" continued Joe, in a tone of impatient contempt. "The Oracle must be well on towards the sixties; he can take his glass with any man, but you never saw him drunk."

"What's the Oracle to do with it?"

"Did you ever hear his history?"

"No. Do you know it?"

"Yes, though I don't think he has any idea that I do. Now, we were talking about the Oracle a little while ago. We know he's an old ass; a good many outsiders consider that he's a bit soft or ratty, and, as we're likely to be mates together for some time on that fencing contract, if we get it, you might as well know what sort of a man he is and was, so's you won't get uneasy about him if he gets deaf for awhile when you're talking, or does funny things with his pipe or pint-pot, or walks up and down by himself for an hour or so after

tea, or sits on a log with his head in his hands, or leans on the fence in the gloaming and keeps looking in a blank sort of way, straight ahead, across the clearing. For he's gazing at something a thousand miles across country, south-east, and about twenty years back into the past, and no doubt he sees himself (as a young man), and a Gippsland girl, spooning under the stars along between the hop-gardens and the Mitchell River. And, if you get holt of a fiddle or a concertina, don't rasp or swank too much on old tunes, when he's round, for the Oracle can't stand it. Play something lively. He'll be down there at that surveyor's camp yarning till all hours, so we'll have plenty of time for the story—but don't you ever give him a hint that you know.

"My people knew him well; I got most of the story from them—mostly from Uncle Bob, who knew him better than any. The rest leaked out through the women—you know how things leak out amongst women?"

Mitchell dropped his head and scratched the back of it. *He* knew.

"It was on the Cudgegong River. My Uncle Bob was mates with him on one of those 'rushes' along there—the 'Pipeclay,' I think it was, or the 'Log Paddock.' The Oracle was a young man then, of course, and so was Uncle Bob (he was a match for most men). You see the Oracle now, and you can imagine what he was when he was

a young man. Over six feet, and as straight as a sapling, Uncle Bob said, clean-limbed, and as fresh as they made men in those days; carried his hands behind him, as he does now, when he hasn't got the swag—but his shoulders were back in those days. Of course he wasn't the Oracle then; he was young Tom Marshall—but that doesn't matter. Everybody liked him—especially women and children. He was a bit happy-go-lucky and careless, but he didn't know anything about 'this world,' and didn't bother about it; he hadn't 'been there.' 'And his heart was as good as gold,' my aunt used to say. He didn't understand women as we young fellows do nowadays, and therefore he hadn't any contempt for 'em. Perhaps he understood, and understands them better than any of us, without knowing it. Anyway, you know, he's always gentle and kind where a woman or child is concerned, and doesn't like to hear us talk about women as we do sometimes.

"There was a girl on the goldfields—a fine lump of a blonde, and pretty gay. She came from Sydney, I think, with her people, who kept shanties on the fields. She had a splendid voice, and used to sing 'Madeline.' There might have been one or two bad women before that, in the Oracle's world, but no cold-blooded, designing ones. He calls the bad ones 'unfortunate.'

"Perhaps it was Tom's looks, or his freshness, or his innocence, or softness—or all together—that

attracted her. Anyway, he got mixed up with her before the goldfield petered out.

"No doubt it took a long while for the facts to work into Tom's head that a girl might sing like she did and yet be thoroughly unprincipled. The Oracle was always slow at coming to a decision, but when he does it's generally the right one. Anyway, you can take that for granted, for you won't move him.

"I don't know whether he found out that she wasn't all that she pretended to be to him, or whether they quarrelled, or whether she chucked him over for a lucky digger. Tom never had any luck on the goldfields. Anyway, he left and went over to the Victorian side, where his people were, and went up Gippsland way. It was there for the first time in his life that he got what you would call 'properly gone on a girl'; he got hard hit—he met his fate.

"Her name was Bertha Bredt, I remember. Aunt Bob saw her afterwards. Aunt Bob used to say that she was 'a girl as God made her'—a good, true, womanly girl—one of the sort of girls that only love once. Tom got on with her father, who was packing horses through the ranges to the new goldfields—it was rough country, and there were no roads; they had to pack everything there in those days, and there was money in it. The girl's father took to Tom—as almost everybody else did—and, as far as the girl was concerned, I think it was a

case of love at first sight. They only knew each other for about six months, and were only 'courting' (as they called it then) for three or four months altogether; but she was that sort of girl that can love a man for six weeks and lose him for ever, and yet go on loving him to the end of her life—and die with his name on her lips.

"Well, things were brightening up every way for Tom, and he and his sweetheart were beginning to talk about their own little home in future, when there came a letter from the 'Madeline' girl in New South Wales.

"She was in terrible trouble. Her baby was to be born in a month. Her people had kicked her out, and she was in danger of starving. She begged and prayed of him to come back and marry her, if only for his child's sake. He could go then, and be free; she would never trouble him any more—only come and marry her for the child's sake.

"The Oracle doesn't know where he lost that letter, but I do. It was burnt afterwards by a woman, who was more than a mother to him in his trouble—Aunt Bob. She thought he might carry it round with the rest of his papers, in his swag, for years, and come across it unexpectedly when he was camped by himself in the bush and feeling dull. It wouldn't have done him any good then.

"He must have fought the hardest fight in his life when he got that letter. No doubt he walked to and fro, to and fro, all night, with his hands

behind him, and his eyes on the ground, as he does now sometimes. Walking up and down helps you to fight a thing out.

"No doubt he thought of things pretty well as he thinks now: the poor girl's shame on every tongue, and belled round the district by every hag in the township; and her looked upon by women as being as bad as any man who ever went to Bathurst in the old days, handcuffed between two troopers. There is sympathy, a pipe and tobacco, a cheering word, and maybe a whisky now and then, for the criminal on his journey; but there is no mercy, at least as far as women are concerned, for the poor foolish girl, who has to sneak out the back way and round by back streets and lanes after dark, with a cloak on to hide her figure.

"Tom sent what money he thought he could spare, and next day he went to the girl he loved and who loved him, and told her the truth, and showed her the letter. She was only a girl—but the sort of girl you *could* go to in a crisis like that. He had made up his mind to do the right thing, and she loved him all the more for it. And so they parted.

"When Tom reached 'Pipeclay,' the girl's relations, that she was stopping with, had a parson readied up, and they were married the same day."

"And what happened after that?" asked Mitchell.

"Nothing happened for three or four months; then the child was born. It wasn't his!"

Mitchell stood up with an oath.

"The girl was thoroughly bad. She'd been carrying on with God knows how many men, both before and after she trapped Tom."

"And what did he do then?"

"Well, you know how the Oracle argues over things, and I suppose he was as big an old fool then as he is now. He thinks that, as most men would deceive women if they could, when one man gets caught, he's got no call to squeal about it; he's bound, because of the sins of men in general against women, to make the best of it. What is one man's wrong counted against the wrongs of hundreds of unfortunate girls.

"It's an uncommon way of arguing—like most of the Oracle's ideas—but it seems to look all right at first sight.

"Perhaps he thought she'd go straight; perhaps she convinced him that he was the cause of her first fall; anyway he stuck to her for more than a year, and intended to take her away from that place as soon as he'd scraped enough money together. It might have gone on up till now, if the father of the child—a big black Irishman named Redmond—hadn't come sneaking back at the end of a year. He—well, he came hanging round Mrs. Marshall while Tom was away at work—and she encouraged him. And Tom was forced to see it.

"Tom wanted to fight out his own battle without interference, but the chaps wouldn't let him—they

reckoned that he'd stand very little show against Redmond, who was a very rough customer and a fighting man. My Uncle Bob, who was there still, fixed it up this way: the Oracle was to fight Redmond, and if the Oracle got licked Uncle Bob was to take Redmond on. If Redmond whipped Uncle Bob, that was to settle it; but if Uncle Bob thrashed Redmond, then he was also to fight Redmond's mate, another big rough Paddy, named Duigan. Then the affair would be finished—no matter which way the last bout went. You see, Uncle Bob was reckoned more of a match for Redmond than the Oracle was, so the thing looked fair enough—at first sight.

"Redmond had his mate, Duigan, and one or two others of the rough gang that used to terrorise the fields round there in the roaring days of Gulgong. The Oracle had Uncle Bob, of course, and long Dave Regan, the drover—a good-hearted, sawny kind of chap that'd break the devil's own buck-jumper, or smash him, or get smashed himself—and little Jimmy Nowlett, the bullocky, and one or two of the old, better-class diggers that were left on the field.

"There's a clear space among the saplings in Specimen Gully, where they used to pitch circuses; and here, in the cool of a summer evening, the two men stood face to face. Redmond was a rough, roaring, foul-mouthed man; he stripped to his shirt, and roared like a bull, and swore, and sneered, and

wanted to take the whole of Tom's crowd while he was at it, and make one clean job of 'em. Couldn't waste time fighting them all one after the other, because he wanted to get away to the new rush at Cattle Creek next day. The fool had been drinking shanty-whisky.

"Tom stood up in his clean, white moles and white flannel shirt—one of that sort with no sleeves, that give the arms play. He had a sort of set expression, and a look in his eyes that Uncle Bob—nor none of them—had ever seen there before. 'Give us plenty of —— room!' roared Redmond; 'one of us is going to hell, now! This is going to be a fight to a —— finish, and a —— short one!' And it was!" Joe paused.

"Go on," said Mitchell—"go on!"

Joe drew a long breath.

"The Oracle never got a mark! He was top-dog right from the start. Perhaps it was his strength that Redmond had underrated, or his want of science that puzzled him, or the awful silence of the man that frightened him (it made even Uncle Bob uneasy). Or perhaps it was Providence (it was a glorious chance for Providence), but, anyway, as I say, the Oracle never got a mark, except on his knuckles. After a few rounds Redmond funked and wanted to give in, but the chaps wouldn't let him—not even his own mates—except Duigan. They made him take it as long as he could stand on his feet. He even shammed to be knocked out, and

roared out something about having broken his —— ankle—but it was no use. And the Oracle! The chaps that knew him thought that he'd refuse to fight, and never hit a man that had given in. But he did. He just stood there with that quiet look in his eyes and waited, and, when he did hit, there wasn't any necessity for Redmond to *pretend* to be knocked down. You'll see a glint of that old light in the Oracle's eyes even now, once in a while; and when you do it's a sign that some one is going too far, and had better pull up, for it's a red light on the line, old as he is.

"Now, Jimmy Nowlett was a nuggety little fellow, hard as cast iron, good-hearted, but very excitable; and when the bashed Redmond was being carted off (poor Uncle Bob was always pretty high-strung, and was sitting on a log sobbing like a great child from the reaction), Duigan made some sneering remark that only Jimmy Nowlett caught, and in an instant he was up and at Duigan.

"Perhaps Duigan was demoralised by his mate's defeat, or by the suddenness of the attack; but, at all events, he got a hiding, too. Uncle Bob used to say that it was the funniest thing he ever saw in his life. Jimmy kept yelling: 'Let me get at him! By the Lord, let me get at him!' And nobody was attempting to stop him, he *was* getting at him all the time—and properly, too; and, when he'd knocked Duigan down, he'd dance round him and call on him to get up; and every time he jumped

or bounced, he'd squeak like an india-rubber ball, Uncle Bob said, and he would nearly burst his boiler trying to lug the big man on to his feet so's he could knock him down again. It took two of Jimmy's mates all their time to lam him down into a comparatively reasonable state of mind after the fight was over.

"The Oracle left for Sydney next day, and Uncle Bob went with him. He stayed at Uncle Bob's place for some time. He got very quiet, they said, and gentle; he used to play with the children, and they got mighty fond of him. The old folks thought his heart was broken, but it went through a deeper sorrow still after that and it ain't broken yet. It takes a lot to break the heart of a man."

"And his wife," asked Mitchell—"what became of her?"

"I don't think he ever saw her again. She dropped down pretty low after he left her—I've heard she's living somewhere quietly The Oracle's been sending some one money ever since I knew him, and I know it's a woman. I suppose it's she. He isn't the sort of a man to see a woman starve—especially a woman he had ever had anything to do with."

"And the Gippsland girl?" asked Mitchell.

"That's the worst part of it all, I think. The Oracle went up North somewhere. In the course of a year or two his affair got over Gippsland way through a mate of his who lived over there, and at

last the story got to the ears of this girl, Bertha Bredt. She must have written a dozen letters to him, Aunt Bob said. She knew what was in 'em, but, of course, she'd never tell us. The Oracle only wrote one in reply. Then, what must the girl do but clear out from home and make her way over to Sydney—to Aunt Bob's place, looking for Tom. She never got any further. She took ill—brain fever, or broken heart, or something of that sort. All the time she was down her cry was: 'I want to see him! I want to find Tom! I only want to see Tom!'

"When they saw she was dying, Aunt Bob wired to the Oracle to come—and he came. When the girl saw it was Tom sitting by the bed, she just gave one long look in his face, put her arms round his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder—and died. . . . Here comes the Oracle now."

Mitchell lifted the tea-billy onto the coals.

THE MYSTERY OF DAVE REGAN

"And then there was Dave Regan," said the traveller. "Dave used to die oftener than any other bushman I knew. He was always being reported dead and turnin' up again. He seemed to like it—except once, when his brother drew his money and drank it all to drown his grief at what he called Dave's 'untimely end.' Well, Dave went up to Queensland once with cattle, and was away three years and reported dead, as usual. He was drowned in the Bongan this time while tryin' to swim his horse acrost a flood—and his sweetheart hurried up and got spliced to a worse man before Dave got back.

"Well, one day I was out in the bush lookin' for timber, when the biggest storm ever knowed in that place come on. There was hail in it, too, as big as bullets, and if I hadn't got behind a stump and crouched down in time I'd have been riddled like a —like a bushranger. As it was, I got soakin' wet. The storm was over in a few minutes, the water run off down the gullies, and the sun come out and the scrub steamed—and stunk like a new pair of moleskin trousers. I went on along the track, and presently I seen a long, lanky chap get on to a long, lanky horse and ride out of a bush yard at the edge

of a clearin'. I knowed it was Dave d'reckly I set eyes on him.

"Dave used to ride a tall, holler-backed thoroughbred with a body and limbs like a kangaroo dog, and it would circle around you and sidle away as if it was frightened you was goin' to jab a knife into it.

"'Ello, Dave!' said I, as he came spurrin' up. 'How are yer!'

"'Ello, Jim!' says he. 'How are you?'

"'All right!' says I. 'How are yer gettin' on?'

"But, before we could say any more, that horse shied away and broke off through the scrub to the right. I waited, because I knowed Dave would come back again if I waited long enough; and in about ten minutes he came sidlin' in from the scrub to the left.

"'Oh, I'm all right,' says he, spurrin' up sideways; 'How are you?'

"'Right!' says I. 'How's the old people?'

"'Oh, I ain't been home yet,' says he, holdin' out his hand; but afore I could grip it, the cussed horse sidled off to the south end of the clearin' and broke away again through the scrub.

"I heard Dave swearin' about the country for twenty minutes or so, and then he came spurrin' and cursin' in from the other end of the clearin'.

"'Where have you been all this time?' I said, as the horse came curvin' up like a boomerang.

"'Gulf country,' said Dave.

"'That was a storm, Dave,' said I.

THE MYSTERY

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And, when I inquired next day, there was no one heard of Dave, and the chaps reckoned I must have been drunk, or seen his ghost.

"It didn't seem all right at all—it worried me a lot. I couldn't make out how Dave kept dry; and the horse and saddle and saddle-cloth was wet. I told the chaps how he talked to me and what he said, and how he swore at the horse; but they only said it was Dave's ghost and nobody else's. I told 'em about him bein' dry as a bone after gettin' caught in that storm; but they only laughed and said it was a dry place where Dave went to. I talked and argued about it until the chaps began to tap their foreheads and wink—then I left off talking. But I didn't leave off thinkin'—I always hated a mystery. Even Dave's father told me that Dave couldn't be alive, or else his ghost wouldn't be round—he said he knew Dave better than that. One or two fellers did turn up afterwards, that had seen Dave about the time that I did—and then the chaps said they was sure that Dave was dead.

"But one fine day, as a lot of us chaps was playin' pitch and toss at the shanty, one of the fellers yelled out:

"'By Gee! Here comes Dave Regan!'

"And I looked up and saw Dave himself, sidlin' out of a cloud of dust on a long lanky horse. He rode into the stockyard, got down, hung his horse up to a post, put up the rails, and then come slopin' towards us with a half-acre grin on his face. Dave

had long, thin bow-legs, and when he was on the ground he moved as if he was on roller skates.

"'El-lo, Dave!' says I. 'How are yer?'

"''Ello, Jim!' said he. 'How the blazes are you?'

"'All right!' says I, shakin' hands. 'How are yer?'

"'Oh! I'm all right!' he says. 'How are yer poppin' up?'

"Well, when we'd got all that settled, and the other chaps had asked how he was, he said: 'Ah, well! Let's have a drink.'

"And all the other chaps crawfished up and flung themselves round the corner and sidled into the bar after Dave. We had a lot of talk, and he told us that he'd been down before, but had gone away without seein' any of us, except me, because he'd suddenly heard of a mob of cattle at a station two hundred miles away; and after awhile I took him aside and said:

"'Look here, Dave! Do you remember the day I met you after the storm?'

"He scratched his head.

"'Why, yes,' he says.

"'Did you get under shelter that day?'

"'Why—no.'

"'Then how the blazes didn't yer get wet?'

"Dave grinned; then he says:

"'Why, when I seen the storm coming I took off me clothes and stuck 'em in a holler log till the rain was over.'

"'Yes,' he says, after the other coves had done laughin', but before I'd done thinking; 'I kept my clothes dry and got a good refreshin' shower-bath into the bargain.'

"Then he scratched the back of his neck with his little finger, and dropped his jaw, and thought a bit; then he rubbed the top of his head and his shoulder, reflective-like, and then he said—

"'But I didn't reckon for them there blanky hailstones.'"

NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN

He had a selection on a long box-scrub siding of the ridges, about half a mile back and up from the coach road. There were no neighbours that I ever heard of, and the nearest "town" was thirty miles away. He grew wheat among the stumps of his clearing, sold the crop standing to a Cockie who lived ten miles away, and had some surplus sons; or, some seasons, he reaped it by hand, had it thrashed by travelling "steamer" (portable steam engine and machine), and carried the grain into the mill, a few bags at a time, on his rickety dray.

He had lived alone for upwards of fifteen years, and was known to those who knew him as "Ratty Howlett."

Trav'lers and strangers failed to see anything uncommonly ratty about him. It was known, or, at least, it was believed without question, that while at work he kept his horse saddled and bridled, and hung up to the fence, or grazing about, with the saddle on—or, anyway, close handy for a moment's notice—and whenever he caught sight, over the scrub and through the quarter-mile break in it, of a traveller on the road, he would jump on his horse and make after him. If it was a horseman he

usually pulled him up inside of a mile. Stories were told of unsuccessful chases, misunderstandings, and complications arising out of Howlett's mania for running down and bailing up travellers. Sometimes he caught one every day for a week, sometimes not one for weeks—it was a lonely track.

The explanation was simple, sufficient, and perfectly natural—from a bushman's point of view. Ratty only wanted to have a yarn. He and the traveller would camp in the shade for half-an-hour or so, and yarn and smoke. The old man would find out where the traveller came from, and how long he'd been there, and where he was making for, and how long he reckoned he'd be away; and ask if there had been any rain along the traveller's back track, and how the country looked after the drought; and he'd get the traveller's ideas on abstract questions—if he had any. If it was a footman (swagman), and he was short of tobacco, old Howlett always had half a stick ready for him. Sometimes, but very rarely, he'd invite the swagman back to the hut for a pint of tea, or a bit of meat, flour, tea, or sugar, to carry him along the track.

And, after the yarn by the road, they said, the old man would ride back, refreshed, to his lonely selection, and work on into the night as long as he could see his solitary old plough horse, or the scoop of his long-handled shovel.

And so it was that I came to make his acquaint-

ance—or, rather, that he made mine. I was cantering easily along the track—I was making for the north-west with a pack-horse—when about a mile beyond the track to the selection I heard, "Hi, Mister!" and saw a dust cloud following me. I had heard of "Old Ratty Howlett" casually, and so was prepared for him.

A tall, gaunt man on a little horse. He was clean-shaven, except for a frill beard round under his chin, and his long, wavy, dark hair was turning grey: a square, strong-faced man, and reminded me of one full-faced portrait of Gladstone more than any other face I had seen. He had large, reddish-brown eyes, deep set under heavy eyebrows, and with something of the blackfellow in them—the sort of eyes that will peer at something on the horizon that no one else can see. He had a way of talking to the horizon, too—more than to his companion; and he had a deep vertical wrinkle in his forehead that no smile could lessen.

I got down and got out my pipe, and we sat on a log and yarned awhile on bush subjects; and then, after a pause, he shifted uneasily, it seemed to me, and asked rather abruptly, and in an altered tone, if I was married. A queer question to ask a traveller; more especially in my case, as I was little more than a boy then.

He talked on again of old things and places where we had both been, and asked after men he knew, or had known—drovers and others—and whether

they were living yet. Most of his inquiries went back before my time; but some of the drovers, one or two overlanders with whom he had been mates in his time, had grown old into mine, and I knew them. I notice now, though I didn't then—and if I had it would not have seemed strange from a bush point of view—that he didn't ask for news, nor seem interested in it.

Then after another uneasy pause, during which he scratched crosses in the dust with a stick, he asked me, in the same queer tone and without looking at me or looking up, if I happened to know anything about doctoring—if I'd ever studied it.

I asked him if any one was sick at his place. He hesitated, and said "No." Then I wanted to know why he had asked me that question, and he was so long about answering that I began to think he was hard of hearing, when, at last, he muttered something about my face reminding him of a young fellow he knew of who'd gone to Sydney to "study for a doctor." That might have been, and looked natural enough; but why didn't he ask me straight out if I was the chap he "knowed of"? Travellers do not like beating about the bush in conversation.

He sat in silence for a good while, with his arms folded, and looking absently away over the dead level of the great scrubs that spread from the foot of the ridge we were on, to where a blue peak or two of a distant range showed above the bush on the horizon.

I stood up and put my pipe away and stretched. Then he seemed to wake up. "Better come back to the hut and have a bit of dinner," he said. "The missus will about have it ready, and I'll spare you a handful of hay for the horses."

The hay decided it. It was a dry season. I was surprised to hear of a wife, for I thought he was a hatter—I had always heard so; but perhaps I had been mistaken, and he had married lately; or had got a housekeeper. The farm was an irregularly-shaped clearing in the scrub, with a good many stumps in it, with a broken-down two-rail fence along the frontage, and logs and "dog-leg" the rest. It was about as lonely-looking a place as I had seen, and I had seen some out-of-the-way, God-forgotten holes where men lived alone. The hut was in the top corner, a two-roomed slab hut, with a shingle roof, which must have been uncommon round there in the days when that hut was built. I was used to bush carpentering, and saw that the place had been put up by a man who had plenty of life and hope in front of him, and for some one else beside himself. But there were two unfinished skilling rooms built on to the back of the hut; the posts, sleepers, and wall-plates had been well put up and fitted, and the slab walls were up, but the roof had never been put on. There was nothing but burrs and nettles inside those walls, and an old wooden bullock plough and a couple of yokes were dry-rotting across the back doorway. The remains

of a straw-stack, some hay under a bark humpy, a small iron plough, and an old stiff coffin-headed grey draught horse, were all that I saw about the place.

But there was a bit of a surprise for me inside, in the shape of a clean white tablecloth on the rough slab table which stood on stakes driven into the ground. The cloth was coarse, but it was a tablecloth—not a spare sheet put on in honour of unexpected visitors—and perfectly clean. The tin plates, pannikins, and jam tins that served as sugar-bowls and salt-cellars were polished brightly. The walls and fireplace were whitewashed, the clay floor swept, and clean sheets of newspaper laid on the slab mantelshelf under the row of biscuit tins that held the groceries. I thought that his wife, or housekeeper, or whatever she was, was a clean and tidy woman about a house. I saw no woman; but on the sofa—a light, wooden, batten one, with runged arms at the ends—lay a woman's dress on a lot of sheets of old stained and faded newspapers. He looked at it in a puzzled way, knitting his forehead, then took it up absently and folded it. I saw then that it was a riding skirt and jacket. He bundled them into the newspapers and took them into the bedroom.

"The wife was going on a visit down the creek this afternoon," he said rapidly, and without looking at me, but stooping as if to have another look through the door at those distant peaks. "I suppose she

got tired o' waitin', and went and took the daughter with her. But, never mind, the grub is ready." There was a camp-oven with a leg of mutton and potatoes sizzling in it on the hearth, and billies hanging over the fire. I noticed the billies had been scraped, and the lids polished.

There seemed to be something queer about the whole business, but then he and his wife might have had a "breeze" during the morning. I thought so during the meal, when the subject of women came up, and he said one never knew how to take a woman, &c.; but there was nothing in what he said that need necessarily have referred to his wife or to any woman in particular. For the rest he talked of old bush things, droving, digging, and old bushranging—but never about live things and living men, unless any of the old mates he talked about happened to be alive by accident. He was very restless in the house, and never took his hat off.

There was a dress and a woman's old hat hanging on the wall near the door, but they looked as if they might have been hanging there for a lifetime. There seemed something queer about the whole place—something wanting; but then all out-of-the-way bush homes are haunted by that something wanting, or, more likely, by the spirits of the things that should have been there, but never had been.

As I rode down the track to the road I looked

back and saw old Howlett hard at work in a hole round a big stump with his long-handled shovel.

I'd noticed that he moved and walked with a slight list to port, and put his hand once or twice to the small of his back, and I set it down to lumbago, or something of that sort.

Up in the Never Never I heard from a drover who had known Howlett that his wife had died in the first year, and so this mysterious woman, if she was his wife, was, of course, his second wife. The drover seemed surprised and rather amused at the thought of old Howlett going in for matrimony again.

. . . . . .

I rode back that way five years later, from the Never Never. It was early in the morning—I had ridden since midnight. I didn't think the old man would be up and about; and, besides, I wanted to get on home, and have a look at the old folk, and the mates I'd left behind—and the girl. But I hadn't got far past the point where Howlett's track joined the road, when I happened to look back, and saw him on horseback, stumbling down the track. I waited till he came up.

He was riding the old grey draught horse this time, and it looked very much broken down. I thought it would have come down every step, and fallen like an old rotten humpy in a gust of wind. And the old man was not much better off. I saw at once that he was a very sick man. His face

was drawn, and he bent forward as if he was hurt. He got down stiffly and awkwardly, like a hurt man, and as soon as his feet touched the ground he grabbed my arm, or he would have gone down like a man who steps off a train in motion. He hung towards the bank of the road, feeling blindly, as it were, for the ground, with his free hand, as I eased him down. I got my blanket and calico from the pack saddle to make him comfortable.

"Help me with my back agen the tree," he said. "I must sit up—it's no use lyin' me down."

He sat with his hand gripping his side, and breathed painfully.

"Shall I run up to the hut and get the wife?" I asked.

"No." He spoke painfully. "No!" Then, as if the words were jerked out of him by a spasm: "She ain't there."

I took it that she had left him.

"How long have you been bad? How long has this been coming on?"

He took no notice of the question. I thought it was a touch of rheumatic fever, or something of that sort. "It's gone into my back and sides now—the pain's worse in me back," he said presently.

I had once been mates with a man who died suddenly of heart disease, while at work. He was washing a dish of dirt in the creek near a claim we were working; he let the dish slip into the

water, fell back, crying, "Oh, my back!" and was gone. And now I felt by instinct that it was poor old Howlett's heart that was wrong. A man's heart is in his back as well as in his arms and hands.

The old man had turned pale with the pallor of a man who turns faint in a heat wave, and his arms fell loosely, and his hands rocked helplessly with the knuckles in the dust. I felt myself turning white, too, and the sick, cold, empty feeling in my stomach, for I knew the signs. Bushmen stand in awe of sickness and death.

But after I'd fixed him comfortably and given him a drink from the water-bag the greyness left his face, and he pulled himself together a bit; he drew up his arms and folded them across his chest. He let his head rest back against the tree—his slouch hat had fallen off, revealing a broad, white brow, much higher than I expected. He seemed to gaze on the azure fin of the range, showing above the dark blue-green bush on the horizon.

Then he commenced to speak—taking no notice of me when I asked him if he felt better now—to talk in that strange, absent, far-away tone that awes one. He told his story mechanically, monotonously—in set words, as I believe now, as he had often told it before; if not to others, then to the loneliness of the bush. And he used the names of people and places that I had never heard of—just as if I knew them as well as he did.

"I didn't want to bring her up the first year. It was no place for a woman. I wanted her to stay with her people and wait till I'd got the place a little more ship-shape. The Phippses took a selection down the creek. I wanted her to wait and come up with them so's she'd have some company—a woman to talk to. They came afterwards, but they didn't stop. It was no place for a woman.

"But Mary would come. She wouldn't stop with her people down country. She wanted to be with me, and look after me, and work and help me."

He repeated himself a great deal—said the same thing over and over again sometimes. He was only mad on one track. He'd tail off and sit silent for awhile; then he'd become aware of me in a hurried, half-scared way, and apologise for putting me to all that trouble, and thank me. "I'll be all right d'reckly. Best take the horses up to the hut and have some breakfast; you'll find it by the fire. I'll foller you, d'reckly. The wife'll be waitin' an'——" He would drop off, and be going again presently on the old track:—

"Her mother was coming up to stay a while at the end of the year, but the old man hurt his leg. Then her married sister was coming, but one of the youngsters got sick and there was trouble at home. I saw the doctor in the town—thirty miles from here—and fixed it up with him. He was a boozer—I'd 'a shot him afterwards. I fixed

up with a woman in the town to come and stay. I thought Mary was wrong in her time. She must have been a month or six weeks out. But I listened to her. . . . Don't argue with a woman. Don't listen to a woman. Do the right thing. We should have had a mother woman to talk to us. But it was no place for a woman!"

He rocked his head, as if from some old agony of mind, against the tree-trunk.

"She was took bad suddenly one night, but it passed off. False alarm. I was going to ride somewhere, but she said to wait till daylight. Some one was sure to pass. She was a brave and sensible girl, but she had a terror of being left alone. It was no place for a woman!

"There was a black shepherd three or four miles away. I rode over while Mary was asleep, and started the black boy into town. I'd 'a shot him afterwards if I'd 'a caught him. The old black gin was dead the week before, or Mary would a' bin alright. She was tied up in a bunch with strips of blanket and greenhide, and put in a hole. So there wasn't even a gin near the place. It was no place for a woman!

"I was watchin' the road at daylight, and I was watchin' the road at dusk. I went down in the hollow and stooped down to get the gap agen the sky, so's I could see if any one was comin' over. . . . I'd get on the horse and gallop along towards the town for five miles. but something would drag

me back, and then I'd race for fear she'd die before I got to the hut. I expected the doctor every five minutes.

"It come on about daylight next morning. I ran back'ards and for'ards between the hut and the road like a madman. And no one come. I was running amongst the logs and stumps, and fallin' over them, when I saw a cloud of dust agen sunrise. It was her mother an' sister in the spring-cart, an' just catchin' up to them was the doctor in his buggy with the woman I'd arranged with in town. The mother and sister was staying at the town for the night, when they heard of the black boy. It took him a day to ride there. I'd 'a shot him if I'd 'a caught him ever after. The doctor'd been on the drunk. If I'd had the gun and known she was gone I'd have shot him in the buggy. They said she was dead. And the child was dead, too.

"They blamed me, but I didn't want her to come; it was no place for a woman. I never saw them again after the funeral. I didn't want to see them any more."

He moved his head wearily against the tree, and presently drifted on again in a softer tone—his eyes and voice were growing more absent and dreamy and far away.

"About a month after—or a year, I lost count of the time long ago—she came back to me. At first she'd come in the night, then sometimes when

I was at work—and she had the baby—it was a girl—in her arms. And by-and-by she came to stay altogether. . . . I didn't blame her for going away that time—it was no place for a woman. . . . She was a good wife to me. She was a jolly girl when I married her. The little girl grew up like her. I was going to send her down country to be educated—it was no place for a girl.

"But a month, or a year ago, Mary left me, and took the daughter, and never came back till last night — this morning, I think it was. I thought at first it was the girl with her hair done up, and her mother's skirt on, to surprise her old dad. But it was Mary, my wife—as she was when I married her. She said she couldn't stay, but she'd wait for me on the road; on—the road. . . ."

His arms fell, and his face went white. I got the water-bag. "Another turn like that and you'll be gone," I thought, as he came to again. Then I suddenly thought of a shanty that had been started, when I came that way last, ten or twelve miles along the road, towards the town. There was nothing for it but to leave him and ride on for help, and a cart of some kind.

"You wait here till I come back," I said. "I'm going for the doctor."

He roused himself a little. "Best come up to the hut and get some grub. The wife'll be waiting."

He was off the track again.

"Will you wait while I take the horse down to the creek?"

"Yes—I'll wait by the road.

"Look!" I said, "I'll leave the water-bag handy. Don't move till I come back."

"I won't move—I'll wait by the road," he said.

I took the pack-horse, which was the freshest and best, threw the pack-saddle and bags into a bush, left the other horse to take care of itself, and started for the shanty, leaving the old man with his back to the tree, his arms folded, and his eyes on the horizon.

One of the chaps at the shanty rode on for the doctor at once, while the other came back with me in a spring-cart. He told me that old Howlett's wife had died in child-birth the first year on the selection—"she was a fine girl he'd heered!" He told me the story as the old man had told it, and in pretty well the same words, even to giving it as his opinion that it was no place for a woman. "And he 'hatted' and brooded over it till he went ratty."

I knew the rest. He not only thought that his wife, or the ghost of his wife, had been with him all those years, but that the child had lived and grown up, and that the wife did the housework; which, of course, he must have done himself.

When we reached him his knotted hands had fallen for the last time, and they were at rest. I only took one quick look at his face, but could have

sworn that he was gazing at the blue fin of the range on the horizon of the bush.

Up at the hut the table was set as on the first day I saw it, and breakfast in the camp-oven by the fire.

MEETING OLD MATES

I

TOM SMITH

You are getting well on in the thirties, and haven't left off being a fool yet. You have been away in another colony or country for a year or so, and have now come back again. Most of your chums have gone away or got married, or, worse still, signed the pledge—settled down and got steady; and you feel lonely and desolate and left-behind enough for anything. While drifting aimlessly round town with an eye out for some chance acquaintance to have a knock round with, you run against an old chum whom you never dreamt of meeting, or whom you thought to be in some other part of the country—or perhaps you knock up against some one who knows the old chum in question, and he says:

"I suppose you know Tom Smith's in Sydney?"

"Tom Smith? Why, I thought he was in Queensland! I haven't seen him for more than three years. Where's the old joker hanging out at all? Why, except you, there's no one in Australia I'd sooner see than Tom Smith. Here I've

been mooning round like an unemployed for three weeks, looking for some one to have a knock round with, and Tom in Sydney all the time. I wish I'd known before. Where'll I run against him—where does he live?"

"Oh, he's living at home."

"But where's his home? I was never there."

"Oh, I'll give you his address. . . . There, I think that's it. I'm not sure about the number, but you'll soon find out in that street—most of 'em'll know Tom Smith."

"Thanks! I rather think they will. I'm glad I met you. I'll hunt Tom up to-day."

So you put a few shillings in your pocket, tell your landlady that you're going to visit an old aunt of yours or a sick friend, and mayn't be home that night; and then you start out to hunt up Tom Smith and have at least one more good night, if you die for it.

. . . . . .

This is the first time you have seen Tom at home; you knew of his home and people in the old days, but only in a vague, indefinite sort of way. Tom has changed! He is stouter and older-looking; he seems solemn and settled down. You intended to give him a surprise and have a good old jolly laugh with him, but somehow things get suddenly damped at the beginning. He grins and grips your hand right enough, but there seems something wanting. You can't help staring at him,

and he seems to look at you in a strange, disappointing way; it doesn't strike you that you also have changed, and perhaps more in his eyes than he in yours. He introduces you to his mother and sisters and brothers, and the rest of the family; or to his wife, as the case may be; and you have to suppress your feelings and be polite and talk commonplace. You hate to be polite and talk commonplace. You aren't built that way—and Tom wasn't either, in the old days. The wife (or the mother and sisters) receives you kindly, for Tom's sake, and makes much of you; but they don't know you yet. You want to get Tom outside, and have a yarn and a drink and a laugh with him—you are bursting to tell him all about yourself, and get him to tell you all about himself, and ask him if he remembers things; and you wonder if he is bursting the same way, and hope he is. The old lady and sisters (or the wife) bore you pretty soon, and you wonder if they bore Tom; you almost fancy, from his looks, that they do. You wonder whether Tom is coming out to-night, whether he wants to get out, and if he wants to and wants to get out by himself, whether he'll be able to manage it; but you daren't broach the subject, it wouldn't be polite. You've got to be polite. Then you get worried by the thought that Tom is bursting to get out with you and only wants an excuse; is waiting, in fact, and hoping for you to ask him in an off-hand sort of way to come out for a stroll. But you're not quite sure; and besides,

if you were, you wouldn't have the courage. By-and-by you get tired of it all, thirsty, and want to get out in the open air. You get tired of saying, "Do you really, Mrs. Smith?" or "Do you think so, Miss Smith?" or "You were quite right, Mrs. Smith," and "Well, I think so too, Mrs. Smith," or, to the brother, "That's just what I thought, Mr. Smith." You don't want to "talk pretty" to them, and listen to their wishy-washy nonsense; you want to get out and have a roaring spree with Tom, as you had in the old days; you want to make another night of it with your old mate, Tom Smith; and pretty soon you get the blues badly, and feel nearly smothered in there, and you've got to get out and have a beer anyway—Tom or no Tom; and you begin to feel wild with Tom himself; and at last you make a bold dash for it and chance Tom. You get up, look at your hat, and say: "Ah, well, I must be going, Tom; I've got to meet some one down the street at seven o'clock. Where'll I meet you in town next week?"

But Tom says:

"Oh, dash it; you ain't going yet. Stay to tea, Joe, stay to tea. It'll be on the table in a minute. Sit down—sit down, man! Here, gimme your hat."

And Tom's sister, or wife, or mother comes in with an apron on and her hands all over flour, and says:

"Oh, you're not going yet, Mr. Brown? Tea'll

be ready in a minute. Do stay for tea." And if you make excuses, she cross-examines you about the time you've got to keep that appointment down the street, and tells you that their clock is twenty minutes fast, and that you have got plenty of time, and so you have to give in. But you are mightily encouraged by a winksome expression which you see, or fancy you see, on your side of Tom's face; also by the fact of his having accidentally knocked his foot against your shins. So you stay.

One of the females tells you to "Sit there, Mr. Brown," and you take your place at the table, and the polite business goes on. You've got to hold your knife and fork properly, and mind your p's and q's, and when she says, "Do you take milk and sugar, Mr. Brown?" you've got to say, "Yes, please, Miss Smith—thanks—that's plenty." And when they press you, as they will, to have more, you've got to keep on saying, "No, thanks, Mrs. Smith; no, thanks, Miss Smith; I really couldn't; I've done very well, thank you; I had a very late dinner, and so on"—damn such tommy-rot! And you don't seem to have any appetite, anyway. And you think of the days out on the track when you and Tom sat on your swags under a mulga at midday, and ate mutton and johnny-cake with clasp-knives, and drank by turns out of the old, battered, leaky billy.

And after tea you have to sit still while the precious minutes are wasted, and listen and sympa-

thise, while all the time you are on the fidget to get out with Tom, and go down to a private bar where you know some girls.

And perhaps by-and-by the old lady gets confidential, and seizes an opportunity to tell you what a good steady young fellow Tom is now that he never touches drink, and belongs to a temperance society (or the Y.M.C.A.), and never stays out of nights.

Consequently you feel worse than ever, and lonelier, and sorrier that you wasted your time coming. You are encouraged again by a glimpse of Tom putting on a clean collar and fixing himself up a bit; but when you are ready to go, and ask him if he's coming a bit down the street with you, he says he thinks he will in such a disinterested, don't-mind-if-I-do sort of tone, that he makes you mad.

At last, after promising to "drop in again, Mr. Brown, whenever you're passing," and to "don't forget to call," and thanking them for their assurance that they'll "be always glad to see you," and telling them that you've spent a very pleasant evening and enjoyed yourself, and are awfully sorry you couldn't stay—you get away with Tom.

You don't say much to each other till you get round the corner and down the street a bit, and then for a while your conversation is mostly commonplace, such as, "Well, how have you been getting on all this time, Tom?" "Oh, all right. How have you been getting on?" and so on.

But presently, and perhaps just as you have made up your mind to chance the alleged temperance business and ask Tom in to have a drink, he throws a glance up and down the street, nudges your shoulder, says "Come on," and disappears sideways into a pub.

. . . . . .

"What's yours, Tom?" "What's yours, Joe?" "The same for me." "Well, here's luck, old man." "Here's luck." You take a drink, and look over your glass at Tom. Then the old smile spreads over his face, and it makes you glad—you could swear to Tom's grin in a hundred years. Then something tickles him—your expression, perhaps, or a recollection of the past—and he sets down his glass on the bar and laughs. Then you laugh. Oh, there's no smile like the smile that old mates favour each other with over the tops of their glasses when they meet again after years. It is eloquent, because of the memories that give it birth.

"Here's another. Do you remember ——? Do you remember ——?" Oh, it all comes back again like a flash. Tom hásn't changed a bit; just the same good-hearted, jolly idiot he always was. Old times back again! "It's just like old times," says Tom, after three or four more drinks.

. . . . . .

And so you make a night of it and get uproariously jolly. You get as "glorious" as Bobby Burns did in the part of Tam O'Shanter, and have a better

"time" than any of the times you had in the old days. And you see Tom as nearly home in the morning as you dare, and he reckons he'll get it hot from his people—which no doubt he will—and he explains that they are very particular up at home—church people, you know—and, of course, especially if he's married, it's understood between you that you'd better not call for him up at home after this—at least, not till things have cooled down a bit. It's always the way. The friend of the husband always gets the blame in cases like this. But Tom fixes up a yarn to tell them, and you aren't to "say anything different" in case you run against any of them. And he fixes up an appointment with you for next Saturday night, and he'll get there if he gets divorced for it. But he *might* have to take the wife out shopping, or one of the girls somewhere; and if you see her with him you've got to lay low, and be careful, and wait—at another hour and place, perhaps, all of which is arranged—for if she sees you she'll smell a rat at once, and he won't be able to get off at all.

And so, as far as you and Tom are concerned, the "old times" have come back once more.

. . . . . .

But, of course (and we almost forgot it), you might chance to fall in love with one of Tom's sisters, in which case there would be another and a totally different story to tell.

II

JACK ELLIS

Things are going well with you. You have escaped from "the track," so to speak, and are in a snug, comfortable little billet in the city. Well, while doing the block you run against an old mate of other days—*very* other days—call him Jack Ellis. Things have gone hard with Jack. He knows you at once, but makes no advance towards a greeting; he acts as though he thinks you might cut him—which, of course, if you are a true mate, you have not the slightest intention of doing. His coat is yellow and frayed, his hat is battered and green, his trousers "gone" in various places, his linen very cloudy, and his boots burst and innocent of polish. You try not to notice these things—or rather, not to seem to notice them—but you cannot help doing so, and you are afraid he'll notice that you see these things, and put a wrong construction on it. How men will misunderstand each other! You greet him with more than the necessary enthusiasm. In your anxiety to set him at his ease and make him believe that nothing—not even money—can make a difference in your friendship, you overact the business; and presently you are afraid that he'll notice that too, and put a wrong construction on it. You wish that your collar was not so clean, nor your clothes so new. Had you known you

would meet him, you would have put on some old clothes for the occasion.

You are both embarrassed, but it is *you* who feel ashamed—you are almost afraid to look at him lest he'll think you are looking at his shabbiness. You ask him in to have a drink, but he doesn't respond so heartily as you wish, as he did in the old days; he doesn't like drinking with anybody when he isn't "fixed," as he calls it—when he can't shout.

It didn't matter in the old days who held the money, so long as there was plenty of "stuff" in the camp. You think of the days when Jack stuck to you through thick and thin. You would like to give him money now, but he is so proud; he always was. He makes you mad with his beastly pride. There wasn't any pride of that sort on the track, or in the camp in those days; but times have changed—your lives have drifted too widely apart—you have taken different tracks since then; and Jack, without intending to, makes you feel that it is so.

You have a drink, but it isn't a success; it falls flat, as far as Jack is concerned; he won't have another; he doesn't "feel on," and presently he escapes under plea of an engagement, and promises to see you again.

And you wish that the time was come when no one could have more or less to spend than another.

. . . . . .

P.S.—I met an old mate of that description once, and so successfully persuaded him out of his beastly pride that he borrowed two pounds off me till Monday. I never got it back since, and I want it badly at the present time. In future I'll leave old mates with their pride unimpaired.

"A ROUGH SHED"

A HOT, breathless, blinding sunrise—the sun having appeared suddenly above the ragged edge of the barren scrub like a great disc of molten steel. No hint of a morning breeze before it, no sign on earth or sky to show that it is morning—save the position of the sun.

A clearing in the scrub—bare as though the surface of the earth were ploughed and harrowed, and dusty as the road. Two oblong huts—one for the shearers and one for the rouseabouts—in about the centre of the clearing (as if even the mongrel scrub had shrunk away from them) built end-to-end, of weatherboards, and roofed with galvanised iron. Little ventilation; no verandah; no attempt to create, artificially, a breath of air through the buildings. Unpainted, sordid—hideous. Outside, heaps of ashes still hot and smoking. Close at hand, "butcher's shop"—a bush and bag break-wind in the dust, under a couple of sheets of iron, with offal, grease, and clotted blood blackening the surface of the ground about it. Greasy, stinking sheepskins hanging everywhere with blood-blotched sides out. Grease inches deep in great black patches about the fireplace ends of

the huts, where wash-up and "boiling" water is thrown.

Inside, a rough table on supports driven into the black, greasy ground floor, and formed of flooring boards, running on uneven lines the length of the hut from within about six feet of the fireplace. Lengths of single six-inch boards or slabs on each side, supported by the projecting ends of short pieces of timber nailed across the legs of the table to serve as seats.

On each side of the hut runs a rough framework, like the partitions in a stable; each compartment battened off to about the size of a manger, and containing four bunks, one above the other, on each side—their ends, of course, to the table. Scarcely breathing space anywhere between. Fireplace, the full width of the hut in one end, where all the cooking and baking for forty or fifty men is done, and where flour, sugar, &c., are kept in open bags. Fire, like a very furnace. Buckets of tea and coffee on roasting beds of coals and ashes on the hearth. Pile of "brownie" on the bare black boards at the end of the table. Unspeakable aroma of forty or fifty men who have little inclination and less opportunity to wash their skins, and who soak some of the grease out of their clothes—in buckets of hot water—on Saturday afternoons or Sundays. And clinging to all, and over all, the smell of the dried, stale yolk of wool—the stink of rams!

. . . . . .

"I am a rouseabout of the rouseabouts. I have fallen so far that it is beneath me to try to climb to the proud position of 'ringer' of the shed. I had that ambition once, when I was the softest of green hands; but then I thought I could work out my salvation and go home. I've got used to hell since then. I only get twenty-five shillings a week (less station store charges) and tucker here. I have been seven years west of the Darling and never shore a sheep. Why don't I learn to shear, and so make money? What should I do with more money? Get out of this and go home? I would never go home unless I had enough money to keep me for the rest of my life, and I'll never make that Out Back. Otherwise, what should I do at home? And how should I account for the seven years, if I were to go home? Could I describe shed life to them and explain how I lived? They think shearing only takes a few days of the year—at the beginning of summer. They'd want to know how I lived the rest of the year. Could I explain that I 'jabbed trotters' and was a 'tea-and-sugar burglar' between sheds. They'd think I'd been a tramp and a beggar all the time. Could I explain *anything* so that they'd understand? I'd have to be lying all the time, and would soon be tripped up and found out. For, whatever else I have been, I was never much of a liar. No, I'll never go home.

"I become momentarily conscious about daylight. The flies on the track got me into that habit, I

think; they start at daybreak — when the mosquitoes give over.

"The cook rings a bullock bell.

"The cook is fire-proof. He is as a fiend from the nethermost sheol, and needs to be. No man sees him sleep, for he makes bread—or worse, brownie—at night, and he rings a bullock bell loudly at half-past five in the morning to rouse us from our animal torpors. Others, the sheep-ho's or the engine-drivers at the shed or wool-wash, call him, if he does sleep. They manage it in shifts, somehow, and sleep somewhere, sometime. We haven't time to know. The cook rings the bullock bell and yells the time. It was the same time five minutes ago—or a year ago. No time to decide which. I dash water over my head and face, and slap handfuls on my eyelids—gummed over aching eyes—still blighted by the yolk o' wool—grey, greasy-feeling water from a cut-down kerosene tin which I sneaked from the cook and hid under my bunk and had the foresight to refill from the cask last night, under cover of warm, still, suffocating darkness. Or was it the night before last? Anyhow, it will be sneaked from me to-day, and from the crawler who will collar it to-morrow, and 'touched' and 'lifted' and 'collared' and recovered by the cook, and sneaked back again, and cause foul language, and fights, maybe, till we 'cut-out.'

"No; we didn't have sweet dreams of home and mother, gentle poet—nor yet of babbling brooks

and sweethearts, and love's young dream. We are too dirty and dog-tired when we tumble down, and have too little time to sleep it off. We don't want to dream those dreams out here—they'd only be nightmares for us, and we'd wake to remember. We *mustn't* remember here.

"At the edge of the timber a great galvanised-iron shed, nearly all roof, coming down to within six feet six inches of the 'board' over the 'shoots.' Cloud of red dust in the dead timber behind, going up — noonday dust. Fence covered with skins; carcasses being burned; blue smoke going straight up as in noonday. Great glossy (greasy-glossy) black crows 'flopping' around.

"The first syren has gone. We hurry in single files from opposite ends of rouseabouts' and shearers' huts (as the paths happen to run to the shed) gulping hot tea or coffee from a pint-pot in one hand and biting at a junk of brownie in the other.

"Shed of forty hands. Shearers rush the pens and yank out sheep and throw them like demons; grip them with their knees, take up machines, jerk the strings; and with a rattling, whirring roar the great machine-shed starts for the day.

"'Go it, you —— tigers!' yells a tar-boy. 'Wool away!' 'Tar!' 'Sheep Ho!' We rush through with a whirring roar till breakfast-time.

"We seize our tin plate from the pile, knife and fork from the candle-box, and crowd round the camp-oven to jab out lean chops, dry as chips,

boiled in fat. Chops or curry-and-rice. There is some growling and cursing. We slip into our places without removing our hats. There's no time to hunt for mislaid hats when the whistle goes. Row of hat brims, level, drawn over eyes, or thrust back—according to characters or temperaments. Thrust back denotes a lucky absence of brains, I fancy. Row of forks going up, or jabbing, or poised, loaded, waiting for last mouthful to be bolted.

"We pick up, sweep, tar, sew wounds, catch sheep that break from the pens, jump down and pick up those that can't rise at the bottom of the shoots, 'bring-my-combs-from-the-grinder-will-yer,' laugh at dirty jokes, and swear—and, in short, are the 'will-yer' slaves, body and soul, of seven, six, five, or four shearers, according to the distance from the rolling tables.

"The shearer on the board at the shed is a demon. He gets so much a hundred; we, twenty-five shillings a week. He is not supposed, by the rules of the shed, the Union, and humanity, to take a sheep out of the pen *after* the bell goes (smoke-ho, meals, or knock-off), but his watch is hanging on the post, and he times himself to get so many sheep out of the pen *before* the bell goes, and *one more*—the 'bell-sheep'—as it is ringing. We have to take the last fleece to the table and leave our board clean. We go through the day of eight hours in runs of about an hour and twenty minutes between smoke-ho's—

from six to six. If the shearers shore 200 instead of 100, they'd get £2 a day instead of £1, and we'd have twice as much work to do for our twenty-five shillings per week. But the shearers are racing each other for tallies. And it's no use kicking. There is no God here, and no Unionism (though we all have tickets). But what am I growling about? I've worked from six to six with no smoke-ho's for half the wages, and food we wouldn't give the sheep-ho dog. It's the bush growl, born of heat, flies, and dust. I'd growl now if I had a thousand a year. We *must* growl, swear, and some of us drink to d.t.'s, or go mad sober.

"Pants and shirts stiff with grease as though a couple of pounds of soft black putty were spread on with a painter's knife.

"No, gentle bard!—we don't sing at our work. Over the whirr and roar and hum all day long, and with iteration that is childish and irritating to the intelligent greenhand, float unthinkable adjectives and adverbs, addressed to jumbucks, jackeroos, and mates indiscriminately. And worse words for the boss over the board—behind his back.

"I came of a Good Christian Family—perhaps that's why I went to the Devil. When I came out here I'd shrink from the man who used foul language. In a short time I used it with the worst. I couldn't help it.

"That's the way of it. If I went back to a woman's country again I wouldn't swear. I'd forget

this as I would a nightmare. That's the way of it. There's something of the larrikin about us. We don't exist individually. Off the board, away from the shed (and each other) we are quiet—even gentle.

"A great-horned ram, in poor condition, but shorn of a heavy fleece, picks himself up at the foot of the 'shoot,' and hesitates, as if ashamed to go down to the other end where the ewes are. The most ridiculous object under heaven.

"A tar-boy of fifteen, of the bush, has a mouth so vile that a street-boy, same age (up with a shearing uncle), kicks him behind—having proved his superiority with his fists before the shed started. Of which unspeakable little fiend the roughest shearer of a rough shed was heard to say, in effect, that if he thought there was the slightest possibility of his becoming the father of such a boy he'd—— take drastic measures to prevent the possibility of his becoming a proud parent at all.

"Twice a day the cooks and their familiars carry buckets of oatmeal-water and tea to the shed, two each on a yoke. We cry, 'Where are you coming to, my pretty maids?'

"In ten minutes the surfaces of the buckets are black with flies. We have given over trying to keep them clear. We stir the living cream aside with the bottoms of the pints, and guzzle gallons, and sweat it out again. Occasionally a shearer pauses and throws the perspiration from his forehead in a rain.

"Shearers live in such a greedy rush of excitement that often a strong man will, at a prick of the shears, fall in a death-like faint on the board.

"We hate the Boss-of-the-Board as the shearers' 'slushy' hates the shearers' cook. I don't know why. He's a very fair boss.

"He refused to put on a traveller yesterday, and the traveller knocked him down. He walked into the shed this morning with his hat back and thumbs in waistcoat—a tribute to man's weakness. He threatened to dismiss the traveller's mate, a bigger man, for rough shearing—a tribute to man's strength. The shearer said nothing. We hate the boss because he *is* boss, but we respect him because he is a strong man. He is as hard up as any of us, I hear, and has a sick wife and a large, small family in Melbourne. God judge us all!

"There is a gambling-school here, headed by the shearers' cook. After tea they head 'em, and advance cheques are passed from hand to hand, and thrown in the dust until they are black. When it's too dark to see with nose to the ground, they go inside and gamble with cards. Sometimes they start on Saturday afternoon, heading 'em till dark, play cards all night, start again heading 'em Sunday afternoon, play cards all Sunday night, and sleep themselves sane on Monday, or go to work ghastly —like dead men.

"Cry of 'Fight'; we all rush out. But there isn't much fighting. Afraid of murdering each

other. I'm beginning to think that most bush crime is due to irritation born of dust, heat, and flies.

"The smothering atmosphere shudders when the sun goes down. We call it the sunset breeze.

"Saturday night or Sunday we're invited into the shearers' hut. There are songs that are not hymns, and recitations and speeches that are not prayers.

"Last Sunday night: slush lamps at long intervals on table. Men playing cards, sewing on patches—(nearly all smoking)—some writing, and the rest reading 'Deadwood Dick.' At one end of the table a Christian Endeavourer endeavouring; at the other a cockney Jew, from the hawker's boat, trying to sell rotten clothes. In response to complaints, direct and not chosen generally for Sunday, the shearers' rep. requests both apostles to shut up or leave.

"He couldn't be expected to take the Christian and leave the Jew, any more than he could take the Jew and leave the Christian. We are just amongst ourselves in our hell.

. . . . . .

"Fiddle at the end of rouseabouts' hut. Voice of Jackeroo, from upper bunk with apologetic oaths: 'For God's sake chuck that up; it makes a man think of blanky old things!'

"A lost soul laughs (mine) and dreadful night smothers us."

PAYABLE GOLD

AMONG the crowds who left the Victorian side for New South Wales about the time Gulgong broke out was an old Ballarat digger named Peter M'Kenzie. He had married and retired from the mining some years previously, and had made a home for himself and family at the village of St. Kilda, near Melbourne; but, as was often the case with old diggers, the gold fever never left him, and when the fields of New South Wales began to blaze he mortgaged his little property in order to raise funds for another campaign, leaving sufficient behind him to keep his wife and family in comfort for a year or so.

As he often remarked, his position was now very different from what it had been in the old days when he first arrived from Scotland, in the height of the excitement following on the great discovery. He was a young man then with only himself to look out for, but now that he was getting old and had a family to provide for he had staked too much on this venture to lose. His position did certainly look like a forlorn hope, but he never seemed to think so.

Peter must have been very lonely and low-

spirited at times. A young or unmarried man can form new ties, and even make new sweethearts if necessary, but Peter's heart was with his wife and little ones at home, and they were mortgaged, as it were, to Dame Fortune. Peter had to lift this mortgage off.

Nevertheless he was always cheerful, even at the worst of times, and his straight grey beard and scrubby brown hair encircled a smile which appeared to be a fixture. He had to make an effort in order to look grave, such as some men do when they want to force a smile.

It was rumoured that Peter had made a vow never to return home until he could take sufficient wealth to make his all-important family comfortable, or, at least, to raise the mortgage from the property, for the sacrifice of which to his mad gold fever he never forgave himself. But this was one of the few things which Peter kept to himself.

The fact that he had a wife and children at St. Kilda was well known to all the diggers. They had to know it, and if they did not know the age, complexion, history, and peculiarities of every child and of the "old woman" it was not Peter's fault.

He would cross over to our place and talk to the mother for hours about his wife and children. And nothing pleased him better than to discover peculiarities in us children wherein we resembled his own. It pleased us also for mercenary reasons. "It's just the same with my old woman," or "It's

just the same with my youngsters," Peter would exclaim boisterously, for he looked upon any little similarity between the two families as a remarkable coincidence. He liked us all, and was always very kind to us, often standing between our backs and the rod that spoils the child—that is, I mean, if it isn't used. I was very short-tempered, but this failing was more than condoned by the fact that Peter's "eldest" was given that way also. Mother's second son was very good-natured; so was Peter's third. Her "third" had a great aversion for any duty that threatened to increase his muscles; so had Peter's "second." Our baby was very fat and heavy, and was given to sucking her own thumb vigorously, and, according to the latest bulletins from home, it was just the same with Peter's "last."

I think we knew more about Peter's family than we did about our own. Although we had never seen them, we were as familiar with their features as the photographer's art could make us, and always knew their domestic history up to the date of the last mail.

We became interested in the M'Kenzie family. Instead of getting bored by them as some people were, we were always as much pleased when Peter got a letter from home as he was himself; and if a mail were missed—which seldom happened—we almost shared his disappointment and anxiety. Should one of the youngsters be ill, we would be

quite uneasy, on Peter's account, until the arrival of a later bulletin removed his anxiety, and ours.

It must have been the glorious power of a big true heart that gained for Peter the goodwill and sympathy of all who knew him.

Peter's smile had a peculiar fascination for us children. We would stand by his pointing forge when he'd be sharpening picks in the early morning, and watch his face for five minutes at a time, wondering sometimes whether he was always *smiling inside*, or whether the smile went on externally irrespective of any variation in Peter's condition of mind.

I think it was the latter case, for often when he had received bad news from home we have heard his voice quaver with anxiety, while the old smile played on his round, brown features just the same.

Little Nelse (one of those queer old-man children who seem to come into the world by mistake, and who seldom stay long) used to say that Peter "cried inside."

Once, on Gulgong, when he attended the funeral of an old Ballarat mate, a stranger who had been watching his face curiously remarked that M'Kenzie seemed as pleased as though the dead digger had bequeathed him a fortune. But the stranger had soon reason to alter his opinion, for when another old mate began in a tremulous voice to repeat the words, "Ashes to ashes, an' dust to dust," two big tears suddenly burst from Peter's eyes, and hurried down to get entrapped in his beard.

Peter's gold-mining ventures were not successful. He sank three duffers in succession on Gulgong, and the fourth shaft, after paying expenses, left a little over a hundred to each party, and Peter had to send the bulk of his share home. He lived in a tent (or in a hut when he could get one) after the manner of diggers, and he "did for himself," even to washing his own clothes. He never drank nor "played," and he took little enjoyment of any kind, yet there was not a digger on the field who would dream of calling old Peter M'Kenzie "a mean man." He lived, as we know from our own observations, in a most frugal manner. He always tried to hide this, and took care to have plenty of good things for us when he invited us to his hut; but children's eyes are sharp. Some said that Peter half-starved himself, but I don't think his family ever knew, unless he told them so afterwards.

Ah, well! the years go over. Peter was now three years from home, and he and Fortune were enemies still. Letters came by the mail, full of little home troubles and prayers for Peter's return, and letters went back by the mail, always hopeful, always cheerful. Peter never gave up. When everything else failed he would work by the day (a sad thing for a digger), and he was even known to do a job of fencing until such time as he could get a few pounds and a small party together to sink another shaft.

Talk about the heroic struggles of early explorers

in a hostile country; but for dogged determination and courage in the face of poverty, illness, and distance, commend me to the old-time digger—the truest soldier Hope ever had!

In the fourth year of his struggle Peter met with a terrible disappointment. His party put down a shaft called the Forlorn Hope near Happy Valley, and after a few weeks' fruitless driving his mates jibbed on it. Peter had his own opinion about the ground—an old digger's opinion, and he used every argument in his power to induce his mates to put a few days' more work in the claim. In vain he pointed out that the quality of the wash and the dip of the bottom exactly resembled that of the "Brown Snake," a rich Victorian claim. In vain he argued that in the case of the above-mentioned claim, not a colour could be got until the payable gold was actually reached. Home Rule and The Canadian and that cluster of fields were going ahead, and his party were eager to shift. They remained obstinate, and at last, half-convinced against his opinion, Peter left with them to sink the "Iawatha," in Log Paddock, which turned out a rank duffer—not even paying its own expenses.

A party of Italians entered the old claim, and after driving it a few feet further, made their fortune.

. . . . . .

We all noticed the change in Peter M'Kenzie when he came to "Log Paddock," whither we had shifted before him. The old smile still flickered, but he had learned to "look" grave for an hour at a time without much effort. He was never quite the same after the affair of Forlorn Hope, and I often think how he must have "cried" sometimes "inside."

However, he still read us letters from home, and came and smoked in the evening by our kitchen fire. He showed us some new portraits of his family which he had received by a late mail, but something gave me the impression that the portraits made him uneasy. He had them in his possession for nearly a week before showing them to us, and to the best of our knowledge he never showed them to anybody else. Perhaps they reminded him of the flight of time—perhaps he would have preferred his children to remain just as he left them until he returned.

But stay! there was one portrait that seemed to give Peter infinite pleasure. It was the picture of a chubby infant of about three years or more. It was a fine-looking child taken in a sitting position on a cushion, and arrayed in a very short shirt. On its fat, soft, white face, which was only a few inches above the ten very podgy toes, was a smile something like Peter's. Peter was never tired of looking at and showing the picture of his child—the child he had never seen. Perhaps

he cherished a wild dream of making his fortune and returning home before *that* child grew up.

. . . . . .

M'Kenzie and party were sinking a shaft at the upper end of Log Paddock, generally called "The other end." We were at the lower end.

One day Peter came down from "the other end" and told us that his party expected to "bottom" during the following week, and if they got no encouragement from the wash they intended to go prospecting at the "Happy Thought," near Specimen Flat.

The shaft in Log Paddock was christened "Nil Desperandum." Towards the end of the week we heard that the wash in the "Nil" was showing good colours.

Later came the news that "M'Kenzie and party" had bottomed on payable gold, and the red flag floated over the shaft. Long before the first load of dirt reached the puddling machine on the creek, the news was all round the diggings. The "Nil Desperandum" was a "Golden Hole"!

. . . . . .

We will not forget the day when Peter went home. He hurried down in the morning to have an hour or so with us before Cobb and Co. went by. He told us all about his little cottage by the bay at St. Kilda. He had never spoken of it before, probably because of the mortgage. He told us how it faced the bay—how many rooms

it had, how much flower garden, and how on a clear day he could see from the window all the ships that came up to the Yarra, and how with a good telescope he could even distinguish the faces of the passengers on the big ocean liners.

And then, when the mother's back was turned, he hustled us children round the corner, and surreptitiously slipped a sovereign into each of our dirty hands, making great pantomimic show for silence, for the mother was very independent.

And when we saw the last of Peter's face setting like a good-humoured sun on the top of Cobb and Co.'s, a great feeling of discontent and loneliness came over all our hearts. Little Nelse, who had been Peter's favourite, went round behind the pig-sty, where none might disturb him, and sat down on the projecting end of a trough to "have a cry" in his usual methodical manner. But old "Alligator Desolation," the dog, had suspicions of what was up, and hearing the sobs, went round to offer whatever consolation appertained to a damp and dirty nose and a pair of ludicrously doleful yellow eyes.

AN OVERSIGHT OF STEELMAN'S

STEELMAN and Smith — professional wanderers — were making back for Wellington, down through the wide and rather dreary-looking Hutt Valley. They were broke. They carried their few remaining belongings in two skimpy, amateurish-looking swags. Steelman had fourpence left. They were very tired and very thirsty—at least Steelman was, and he answered for both. It was Smith's policy to feel and think just exactly as Steelman did. Said Steelman:

"The landlord of the next pub is not a bad sort. I won't go in—he might remember me. You'd best go in. You've been tramping round in the Wairarapa district for the last six months, looking for work. You're going back to Wellington now, to try and get on the new corporation works just being started there—the sewage works. You think you've got a show. You've got some mates in Wellington, and they're looking out for a chance for you. You did get a job last week on a sawmill at Silverstream, and the boss sacked you after three days and wouldn't pay you a penny. That's just his way. I know him—at least a mate of mine does. I've heard of him often enough. His name's

Cowman. Don't forget the name, whatever you do. The landlord here hates him like poison; he'll sympathise with you. Tell him you've got a mate with you; he's gone ahead—took a short cut across the paddocks. Tell him you've got only fourpence left, and see if he'll give you a drop in a bottle. Says you: 'Well, boss, the fact is we've only got fourpence, but you might let us have a drop in a bottle;' and very likely he'll stand you a couple of pints in a gin-bottle. You can fling the coppers on the counter, but the chances are he won't take them. He's not a bad sort. Beer's fourpence a pint out here, same's in Wellington. See that gin-bottle lying there by the stump; get it, and we'll take it down to the river with us and rinse it out."

They reached the river bank.

"You'd better take my swag—it looks more decent," said Steelman. "No, I'll tell you what we'll do: we'll undo both swags and make them into one—one decent swag, and I'll cut round through the lanes and wait for you on the road ahead of the pub."

He rolled up the swag with much care and deliberation and considerable judgment. He fastened Smith's belt round one end of it, and the handkerchiefs round the other, and made a towel serve as a shoulder-strap.

"I wish we had a canvas-bag to put it in," he said, "or a cover of some sort. But never mind. The landlord's an old Australian bushman, now I

come to think of it; the swag looks Australian enough, and it might appeal to his feelings, you know—bring up old recollections. But you'd best not say you come from Australia, because he's been there, and he'd soon trip you up. He might have been where you've been, you know, so don't try to do too much. You always do mug-up the business when you try to do more than I tell you. You might tell him your mate came from Australia—but no, he might want you to bring me in. Better stick to Maoriland. I don't believe in too much ornamentation. Plain lies are the best."

"What's the landlord's name?" asked Smith.

"Never mind that. You don't want to know that. You are not supposed to know him at all. It might look suspicious if you called him by his name, and lead to awkward questions; then you'd be sure to put your foot into it."

"I could say I read it over the door."

"Bosh. Travellers don't read the names over the doors when they go into pubs. You're an entire stranger to him. Call him 'boss.' Say 'Good day, boss,' when you go in, and swing down your swag as if you're used to it. Ease it down like this. Then straighten yourself up, stick your hat back, and wipe your forehead, and try to look as hearty and independent and cheerful as you possibly can. Curse the Government, and say the country's done. It don't matter what Government it is, for he's always against it. I never knew a real Australian

that wasn't. Say that you're thinking about trying to get over to Australia, and then listen to him talking about it—and try to look interested, too! Get that damned stone-deaf expression off your face! . . . He'll run Australia down most likely (I never knew an Othersider that had settled down over here who didn't). But don't you make any mistake and agree with him, because, although successful Australians over here like to run their own country down, there's very few of them that care to hear anybody else do it. . . . Don't come away as soon as you get your beer. Stay and listen to him for a while, as if you're interested in his yarning, and give him time to put you on to a job, or offer you one. Give him a chance to ask how you and your mate are off for tobacco or tucker. Like as not he'll sling you half-a-crown when you come away—that is, if you work it all right. Now try to think of something to say to him, and make yourself a bit interesting—if you possibly can. Tell him about the fight we saw back at the pub the other day. He might know some of the chaps. This is a sleepy hole, and there ain't much news knocking round. . . . I wish I could go in myself, but he's sure to remember *me*. I'm afraid he got left the last time I stayed there (so did one or two others); and, besides, I came away without saying good-bye to him, and he might feel a bit sore about it. That's the worst of travelling on the old road. Come on now, wake up!"

"Bet I'll get a quart," said Smith, brightening up, "and some tucker for it to wash down."

"If you don't," said Steelman, "I'll stoush you. Never mind the bottle; fling it away. It doesn't look well for a traveller to go into a pub with an empty bottle in his hand. A real swagman never does. It looks much better to come out with a couple of full ones. That's what you've got to do. Now, come along."

Steelman turned off into a lane, cut across the paddocks to the road again, and waited for Smith. He hadn't long to wait.

Smith went on towards the public-house, rehearsing his part as he walked—repeating his "lines" to himself, so as to be sure of remembering all that Steelman had told him to say to the landlord, and adding, with what he considered appropriate gestures, some fancy touches of his own, which he determined to throw in in spite of Steelman's advice and warning. "I'll tell him (this)—I'll tell him (that). Well, look here, boss, I'll say, you're pretty right and I quite agree with you as far as that's concerned, but," &c. And so, murmuring and mumbling to himself, Smith reached the hotel. The day was late, and the bar was small, and low, and dark. Smith walked in with all the assurance he could muster, eased down his swag in a corner in what he no doubt considered the true professional style, and, swinging round to the bar, said in a loud voice which he intended to be cheerful, independent, and hearty:

"Good-day, boss!"

But it wasn't a "boss." It was about the hardest-faced old woman that Smith had ever seen. The pub had changed hands.

"I—I beg your pardon, missus," stammered poor Smith.

It was a knock-down blow for Smith. He couldn't come to time. He and Steelman had had a landlord in their minds all the time, and laid their plans accordingly; the possibility of having a she — and one like this — to deal with, never entered into their calculations. Smith had no time to reorganise, even if he had had the brains to do so, without the assistance of his mate's knowledge of human nature.

"I—I beg your pardon, missus," he stammered.

Painful pause. She sized him up.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Well, missus—I—the fact is—will you give me a bottle of beer for fourpence?"

"Wha—what?"

"I mean— The fact is, we've only got fourpence left, and—I've got a mate outside, and you might let us have a quart or so, in a bottle, for that. I mean — anyway, you might let us have a pint. I'm very sorry to bother you, missus."

But she couldn't do it. No. Certainly not. Decidedly not. All her drinks were sixpence. She had her license to pay, and the rent, and a family to keep. It wouldn't pay out there—it wasn't

worth her while. It wouldn't pay the cost of carting the liquor out, &c. &c.

"Well, missus," poor Smith blurted out at last, in sheer desperation, "give me what you can in a bottle for this. I've—I've got a mate outside." And he put the four coppers on the bar.

"Have you got a bottle?"

"No—but——"

"If I give you one, will you bring it back? You can't expect me to give you a bottle as well as a drink."

"Yes, mum; I'll bring it back directly."

She reached out a bottle from under the bar, and very deliberately measured out a little over a pint and poured it into the bottle, which she handed to Smith without a cork.

Smith went his way without rejoicing. It struck him forcibly that he should have saved the money until they reached Petone, or the city, where Steelman would be sure to get a decent drink. But how was he to know? He had chanced it, and lost; Steelman might have done the same. What troubled Smith most was the thought of what Steelman would say; he already heard him, in imagination, saying: "You're a mug, Smith—Smith, you *are* a mug."

But Steelman didn't say much. He was prepared for the worst by seeing Smith come along so soon. He listened to his story with an air of gentle sadness, even as a stern father might listen

to the voluntary confession of a wayward child; then he held the bottle up to the fading light of departing day, looked through it (the bottle), and said:

"Well—it ain't worth while dividing it."

Smith's heart shot right down through a hole in the sole of his left boot into the hard road.

"Here, Smith," said Steelman, handing him the bottle, "drink it, old man; you want it. It wasn't altogether your fault; it was an oversight of mine. I didn't bargain for a woman of that kind, and, of course, *you* couldn't be expected to think of it. Drink it! Drink it down, Smith. I'll manage to work the oracle before this night is out."

Smith was forced to believe his ears, and, recovering from his surprise, drank.

"I promised to take back the bottle," he said, with the ghost of a smile.

Steelman took the bottle by the neck and broke it on the fence.

"Come on, Smith; I'll carry the swag for a while."

And they tramped on in the gathering starlight.

HOW STEELMAN TOLD HIS STORY

It was Steelman's humour, in some of his moods, to take Smith into his confidence, as some old bushmen do their dogs.

"You're nearly as good as an intelligent sheep-dog to talk to, Smith—when a man gets tired of thinking to himself and wants a relief. You're a bit of a mug and a good deal of an idiot, and the chances are that you don't know what I'm driving at half the time—that's the main reason why I don't mind talking to you. You ought to consider yourself honoured; it ain't every man I take into my confidence, even that far."

Smith rubbed his head.

"I'd sooner talk to you—or a stump—any day than to one of those silent, suspicious, self-contained, worldly-wise chaps that listen to everything you say—sense and rubbish alike—as if you were trying to get them to take shares in a mine. I drop the man who listens to me all the time and doesn't seem to get bored. He isn't safe. He isn't to be trusted. He mostly wants to grind his axe against yours, and there's too little profit for me where there are two

axes to grind, and no stone—though I'd manage it once, anyhow."

"How'd you do it?" asked Smith.

"There are several ways. Either you join forces, for instance, and find a grindstone—or make one of the other man's axe. But the last way is too slow, and, as I said, takes too much brain-work—besides, it doesn't pay. It might satisfy your vanity or pride, but I've got none. I had once, when I was younger, but it—well, it nearly killed me, so I dropped it.

"You can mostly trust the man who wants to talk more than you do; he'll make a safe mate—or a good grindstone."

Smith scratched the nape of his neck and sat blinking at the fire, with the puzzled expression of a woman pondering over a life-question or the trimming of a hat. Steelman took his chin in his hand and watched Smith thoughtfully.

"I—I say, Steely," exclaimed Smith suddenly, sitting up and scratching his head and blinking harder than ever—"wha—what am I?"

"How do you mean?"

"Am I the axe or the grindstone?"

"Oh! your brain seems in extra good working order to-night, Smith. Well, you turn the grindstone and I grind." Smith settled. "If you could grind better than I, I'd turn the stone and let *you* grind—I'd never go against the interests of the firm—that's fair enough, isn't it?"

"Ye-es," admitted Smith; "I suppose so."

"So do I. Now, Smith, we've got along all right together for years, off and on, but you never know what might happen. I might stop breathing, for instance—and so might you."

Smith began to look alarmed.

"Poetical justice might overtake one or both of us—such things have happened before, though not often. Or, say, misfortune or death might mistake us for honest, hard-working mugs with big families to keep, and cut us off in the bloom of all our wisdom. You might get into trouble, and, in that case, I'd be bound to leave you there, on principle; or I might get into trouble, and you wouldn't have the brains to get me out—though I know you'd be mug enough to try. I might make a rise and cut you, or you might be misled into showing some spirit, and clear out after I'd stoushed you for it. You might get tired of me calling you a mug, and bossing you and making a tool or convenience of you, you know. You might go in for honest graft (you were always a bit weak-minded) and then I'd have to wash my hands of you (unless you agreed to keep me) for an irreclaimable mug. Or it might suit me to become a respected and worthy fellow-townsman, and then, if you came within ten miles of me, or hinted that you ever knew me, I'd have you up for vagrancy, or soliciting alms, or attempting to levy blackmail. I'd have to fix you—so I give you fair warning. Or we might get into some desperate fix (and it needn't be very desperate,

either) when I'd be obliged to sacrifice you for my own personal safety, comfort, and convenience. Hundreds of things might happen.

"Well, as I said, we've been at large together for some years, and I've found you sober, trustworthy, and honest; so, in case we do part — as we will sooner or later—and you survive, I'll give you some advice from my own experience.

"In the first place: if you ever happen to get born again—and it wouldn't do you much harm—get born with the strength of a bullock and the hide of one as well, and a swelled head, and no brains—at least, no more brains than you've got now. I was born with a skin like tissue-paper, and brains; also a heart.

"Get born without relatives, if you can; if you can't help it, clear out on your own just as soon after you're born as you possibly can. I hung on.

"If you have relations, and feel inclined to help them any time when you're flush (and there's no telling what a weak-minded man like you might take it into his head to do)—don't do it. They'll get a down on you if you do. It only causes family troubles and bitterness. There's no dislike like that of a dependant. You'll get neither gratitude nor civility in the end, and be lucky if you escape with a character. (You've got *no* character, Smith; I'm only just supposing you have.) If you help relations more than once they'll begin to regard it as a right; and when you're forced to leave off helping them, they'll hate you worse than they'd

hate a stranger. No one likes to be deprived of his rights—especially by a relation. There's no hatred too bitter for, and nothing too bad to be said of, the mug who turns. The worst yarns about a man are generally started by his own tribe, and the world believes them at once on that very account. Well, the first thing to do in life is to escape from your friends.

"If you ever go to work—and miracles have happened before—no matter what your wages are, or how you are treated, you can take it for granted that you're sweated; act on that to the best of your ability, or you'll never rise in the world. If you go to see a show on the nod you'll be found a comfortable seat in a good place; but if you pay, the chances are the ticket clerk will tell you a lie, and you'll have to hustle for standing room. The man that doesn't ante gets the best of this world; anything he'll stand is good enough for the man that pays. If you try to be too sharp you'll get into gaol sooner or later; if you try to be too honest, the chances are that the bailiff will get into your house—if you have one—and make a holy show of you before the neighbours. The honest softy is more often mistaken for a swindler, and accused of being one, than the out-and-out scamp; and the man that tells the truth too much is set down as an irreclaimable liar. But most of the time crow low and roost high, for it's a funny world, and you never know what might happen.

"And if you get married (and there's no accounting for a woman's taste) be as bad as you like, and then moderately good, and your wife will love you. If you're bad all the time she can't stand it for ever, and if you're good all the time she'll naturally treat you with contempt. Never explain what you're going to do, and don't explain afterwards, if you can help it. If you find yourself between two stools, strike hard for your own self, Smith—strike hard, and you'll be respected more than if you fought for all the world. Generosity isn't understood nowadays, and what the people don't understand is either 'mad' or 'cronk.' Failure has no case, and you can't build one for it. . . . I started out in life very young—and very soft."

. . . . . .

"I thought you were going to tell me your story, Steely," remarked Smith.

Steelman smiled sadly.

THE END

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